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Adopting Narrative Mediation in Protracted International Conflict: Transcending the

relational and emotional hurdles to resolution in inter-group conflicts

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ABSTRACT

For several decades, scholars and practitioners of conflict resolution have been trying to formulate answers to what are known as "protracted" or "intractable" international conflicts. In these conflicts, many approaches to finding an effective resolution have been developed and tested, but are ultimately discarded after peace talks fail or years of negotiation reach political stalemate. Researchers have identified many reasons for the persistence of these conflicts but they have tended to focus on the overwhelming substantive issues (political, economic, legal, temporal, etc.) that have complicated official negotiations and the abilities of parties to reach any lasting resolution. This paper takes a more critical look at the negotiation and mediation attempts that have been employed in these types of conflicts and explores whether another set of issues relating to the relational and emotional aspects of protracted conflicts have been absent from the negotiations and mediations that were conducted in Northern Ireland, Cyprus, and The Republic of Georgia. Narrative Mediation is introduced as a supplemental approach to more conventional efforts at transforming protracted conflict, and its potential for adoption at both Track One and Track Three level interventions is explored.

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<u>Introduction</u>

For several decades, scholars and practitioners of conflict resolution have been trying to formulate answers to what are known as "protracted" or "intractable" international conflicts. In these conflicts, many approaches to finding an effective resolution have been developed and tested, but are ultimately discarded after peace talks fail or years of negotiation reach political stalemate. What protracted conflicts have essentially become to the rest of the world are conflicts for which no answers can be found and the possibility for resolution seems hopelessly optimistic. Despite these bleak characteristics, however, for many practitioners of conflict resolution, protracted conflicts (like those between Israelis and Palestinians and those between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland) retain a degree of professional and personal intrigue in their ability to constantly evade the most skillful or seemingly well-crafted intervention. Some may even liken the process to the piecing together of a puzzle with shapes that have congruent sides. In theory, the pieces can fit together in any number of ways … but unlike a jigsaw, the puzzle can't be solved without careful attention to the details that are printed on each individual piece.

Researchers have identified many reasons for the persistence of these conflicts but they have tended to focus on the overwhelming substantive issues (political, economic, legal, temporal, etc.) that have complicated official negotiations and the abilities of parties to reach any lasting resolution. While it is important not to underestimate the effects that these issues have had on the conflict resolution process, this paper takes a more critical look at the negotiation and mediation attempts that have been employed and explores whether another set of issues relating to the relational and emotional aspects of protracted conflicts was absent from the way

negotiations and mediations were conducted. The failure to address the relational and emotional considerations may very well be an additional factor that has led to the continuation of the conflicts, and one that practitioners have largely viewed as secondary to the settlement process.

This paper explores the practice of Narrative Mediation, provides a review of approaches similar to it in style, and discusses whether practitioners working in protracted conflict should consider narrative mediation as a tool for addressing the relational and cultural factors that have influenced and continue to influence settlement negotiations. An exploration of three well-known protracted conflicts in Northern Ireland, Cyprus, and the Eurasian country of Georgia are highlighted, with an emphasis on what has caused negotiations to unravel in each of these countries, and, in the case of Northern Ireland, why conflict still exists on the ground after formal resolution was reached. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the role that Non-governmental organizations have played in the conflict resolution field and raises the question of whether training in Narrative Mediation would help support negotiations at the track one level while simultaneously fostering an environment at the community level that is more conducive to peace and reconciliation.

Narrative Mediation Theory

Before embarking on an in-depth analysis of what a narrative approach to mediation might offer in these particular conflicts, it would be beneficial to explore what narrative mediation is and how it differs from other styles of mediation. To be clear from the onset, however, Narrative Mediation should not be viewed as a practice that is entirely divorced from other styles. There has been a great deal of consternation within the field of conflict resolution over the "touting" of different models of mediation by practitioners because it infers that the techniques highlighted in each model are mutually exclusive. Regardless of which style a practitioner adopts, each approach will belong to the wider practice of mediation and share more commonalities than differences. Despite this, there remains great value in being able to distinguish how conflict is perceived, treated, and approached by these styles if a mediator is going to adequately utilize the options available to him/her and not gloss over the foundational view that makes each approach unique.

Narrative Mediation is grounded in the theory of Social Constructionism, which proposes that people are the "products of social processes" and that "much of what we know is hardwired into our psyches by the social and cultural world around us" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 37). In other words, basic needs are not a natural process so much as one that is constructed by "social discourses and conversations around which needs are identified and interests are formed" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 38). These obviously do not include those needs that are essential for survival (i.e., food, water, shelter, etc). Taken in this regard, human needs are not ephemeral so much as they are influenced or manipulated by the types of conversations we engage in and

can be changed when/if the conversation is changed (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 38). Social

Constructionism also challenges whether facts are truly objective in practice. Under this theory:

> All knowledge is derived from a perspective. Perspectives are relative to particular cultural or social versions of reality. In this sense, knowledge can never be final and is relative to time and place and to the social landscape out of which it has been produced. Coming to know the truth about anything is as much about coming to understand the perspective from which it appears in a certain way as it is about how the object looks (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 38).

Finally, social constructionism proposes that language and social discourse shape the way people

think and the way their worldview is constructed (Winslade & Monk, 2001, pp. 39-40). Rather

than being a simple expression of what naturally exists within us, language has the power to

enact action rather than simply describe it (i.e., language is action) (Winslade & Monk, 2001, pp.

39-40). Taken in this light, Burr (1995) argues that under the theory of social constructionism,

"There are no 'essences' inside things or people that make them what they are." Burr (1995)

continues:

> Social constructionism cautions us to be ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be. This means that the categories with which human beings apprehend the world do not necessarily refer to real divisions. For instance, our observation of the world suggests to us that there are two categories of human being – men and women. Social constructionism would bid us to question seriously whether this category is even simply a reflection of naturally occurring distinct types of human beings (despite the fact that that there are differences in reproductive organs in many species) and ask why this distinction has been given so much importance that whole personhoods (i.e., man/woman) have been built upon it. Social constructionism would suggest that we might equally well (and just as absurdly) have divided people up into tall and short, or those with ear lobes and those without (Burr, 1995, p. 3).

In 2001, John Winslade and Gerald Monk, authors of Narrative Mediation, discussed the

influence social constructionism has on the mediation process and what distinguishes narrative

mediation from styles of mediation described as interest-based problem-solving. According to

Winslade and Monk (2001), the emphasis on perspectives rather than on objective facts shifts the

focus of mediation away from merely establishing parties' interests to an exploration of "the

cultural and historical processes by which these facts and interests came to be." Winslade and

Monk (2001) emphasize:

> The notion that language is a precondition for thought has profound implications on the mediation process in that language is seen as having the function of permitting or constraining the options available to us. Moreover, because language is inherited from the cultural world into which we are born (and thus not of our own making) it is difficult to view individuals as prime movers in their own worlds (Winslade & Monk, 2001, pp. 39-40).

Language as a form of action also influences mediation because, as language is used in mediation, "social action is always taking place rather than just being talked about" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 40). In other words, mediation is seen not just as a setting in which the worlds that participants have created are explored and discussed but it is also a place where worlds can continue to be created/changed (Winslade & Monk, 2001).

Narrative Mediation, which embodies these ideas, views conflict in a very distinct way, one that Winslade & Monk (2001) describe as having been informed by a Postmodern philosophy that suggests that "there is no single definable reality, but a great diversity in the ways we make meanings in our lives" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 41). According to Winslade and Monk (2001):

> Narrative Mediation views conflict as likely because people do not have direct access to the truth or to the facts about any situation. Rather, they always view things from a perspective, from a cultural position. Drawing from this perspective, they develop a story about what has happened and continue to act in a social situation out of the story they have created. Facts, from this perspective, are simply stories that are generally accepted. Conflict is thus viewed as the almost inevitable byproduct of diversity, rather than as the result of the expression of personal needs or interests (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 41).

The preference with which people assign allegiance to their own story of conflict can, as Winslade & Monk (1998) point out, narrow their focus to such a degree that other positive experiences/stories they've shared are brushed aside and/or forgotten. A key assumption made by Narrative Mediation, however, is that flushing out contradictions to the conflict story is key to changing relationship dynamics between disputing parties. Winslade and Monk (1998) state:

> Giving contradictions and gaps in a conflict story more attention can open up spaces for change. This field of unstoried experience provides a rich and fertile source for the generation, or regeneration, of alternative stories and, consequently, reconfigured relationships. The narrative mediator's task is thus

to work with participants to explore the narratives behind their conflict story, and then to identify and develop alternative, preferred stories (Winslade & Monk, 1998, p. 26).

Another important theoretical underpinning of narrative mediation (also informed by postmodernism) is the notion of where stability in a relationship emanates from. As Winslade and Monk (2001) point out, "It is the repetitive interactions between people rather than some built-in stable nature that provide stability and a sense of continuity" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 45). Relationships become conflicted when these repetitive interactions mimic dissonance (Monk & Winslade, 2001). Moreover, narrative mediation assumes that within these interactions the individual also has "opportunities to recreate or reconstruct himself or herself anew," which contrasts sharply with any notion that identity is something that is fixed or unchangeable (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 45). The significance of these assumptions about identity and community in the context of protracted conflict will be highlighted in later sections, but for now it's important to understand what influence narrative theory has on the mediator. Winslade and Monk (2001) note that from the narrative perspective:

> Narrative mediators are interested in exploring more than what the parties are clear and certain about, they are also interested in exploring the gray areas, the dilemmas and the internal conflicts. The complexity of dealing with ambiguities and contradictions within the mediation process is seen as beneficial, as it increases the range of possibilities for how things can develop. (Winslade & Monk 2001, p. 47)

Thus, entering into mediation with a preference for reducing complexity and promoting "coherence" is seen as highly limiting and antithetical to the promotion of change (Winslade & Monk, 2001).

Before exploring what narrative mediation actually looks like and what it does, there is one final concept that needs to be examined: The actual *narrative* component of narrative mediation. According to Burr (1995):

> Human beings organize their experiences in terms of stories. When we 'remember' a dream, we do not recount a list of unconnected events and images; we see it and recount it as a story that has a

beginning, a middle, and an end. Moreover, when we tell someone our life so far, we do not recount (or even remember) the entire content of our experience to date. We craft our tale according to a theme. If the theme of a person's self-narrative is 'Life has always dealt me an unfair hand', then events which might be seen as lucky or otherwise positive might be smoothed over in order to fit them to the theme, or left out altogether (Burr, 1995, pp. 134-135).

 Winslade & Monk (2001) highlight, however, that the notion of a narrative approach to

mediation is much richer than mere "story-telling." For instance:

> Because people make meaning in story form, the meanings they make serve to set the stage on which they enact their performances. The point for mediation is that stories take on a life of their own, and when a conflict story takes root it generates a momentum that does not reflect the facts or realities of a situation because stories mediate our knowledge of reality. (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 52)

The implication this has for the mediation process is one of the things that separates narrative

mediation from other styles. Winslade and Monk (2001) continue:

> The success of a mediation might depend not so much on the extent to which a mediator can separate the story of the dispute from the realities or facts, but on the extent to which the mediator can work with the parties to create an alternative story (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 52).

The authors are quick to point out, however, that within the mediation process the potential for a

series of stories to surface is highly possible. These include "stories of the conflict told by each

party, stories from parties supporting each party in conflict, the unfolding story of the mediation

itself, and background stories that include familial, cultural and fictional influences on the

parties' relationship" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 52). Winslade and Monk (2001) add:

> The task of mediation can be considered to be a teasing out of these stories in order to open up possibilities for alternative stories to gain an audience. Rather than searching for the one true story, the narrative mode of thinking welcomes the complexity of competing stories and numerous influential background stories. Out of this complexity can emerge a range of possible futures from which parties to a mediation can choose, opening their thinking to the possibility that things can be different. In this kind of climate, substantive changes are possible (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 53).

Herein lies another important point – namely, that narrative mediation does not supplant the

significance of substantive issues with a focus on the relational aspects of conflict. Rather,

progress in narrative mediation can be viewed as a necessary precursor to establishing the

environment needed for other issues deemed important to the parties in conflict to be

negotiated/discussed.

The Narrative Mediation Model

The previous section discussed the theory and philosophy behind narrative mediation. This section will provide a very brief overview of the actual stages and tools used by narrative mediators. The section that follows will then compare the narrative model to other styles similar to it in practice.

As previously mentioned, the intent of this paper is not to introduce a model of mediation that is drastically different from other mediation models. Providing a detailed account of every step in the process would only seem redundant in light of the fact that many of the steps used in the narrative approach are common to the wider practice of mediation. What is important, however, is an account of the steps that differ from other styles.

From the outset of the mediation, narrative practitioners are concerned with the relationship of the parties in conflict. This means that in the process of engaging the parties to tell their stories, narrative mediators are "endeavoring to develop ways of speaking that invite relationship repairing and rebuilding" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 71). The breakdown of the relationship between parties is thus thought to be a significantly contributing cause of the conflict (not a secondary effect). Making a conscious effort to bring the two parties together by encouraging an attack of the effects of the conflict is viewed as a preliminary step in the mediation process (Winslade & Monk, 2001). Once a narrative mediator has engaged the parties, he/she begins the "deconstruction" of the conflict story by "undermining the certainties on which the conflict feeds and inviting the participants to view the plot of the dispute from a different angle" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 71). This is done through a "deconstructive" phase in which the mediator

externalizes language and question-asking, names the problem, historicizes the conflict, and probes for unique outcomes (Winslade & Monk, 2001).

According to Winslade, Monk and Cotter (1998), externalization involves placing the conflict as a third party in the mediation (one to which all blame can be attributed). This is promoted by a change in language and question asking that separates the identity of the parties from the conflict and their propensity to attach blame (Winslade et al., 1998, p. 33). Some examples of deconstructive questions include:

- How has this argument affected you? How much has it dominated your life?
- What has been putting your relationship under siege?
- What effect has all this had on you? What is it costing you?
- Has this issue had any spin-offs in other areas of your life? (Winslade et al., 1998, p. 33)

From the outset this appears like any exercise of depersonalization, but what makes it unique is that blame is not just detached from the parties and expected to evaporate as result. A third entity is being created, which allows each party to continue to assign blame to something while simultaneously allowing for a level of commonality to be identified between the parties who have both been wronged by conflict. This is further emphasized by putting a name to the conflict itself.

According to Winslade and Monk (2001), "Agreement on a name for the problem that satisfies both parties can constitute a significant step in undermining the power of the problem" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 147). Winslade and Monk (2001) continue:

> Often the step of naming the problem can be achieved by tracing and summarizing a sequence of events that have transpired over time. The cyclic or recursive nature of these interactions can be mapped (perhaps on a whiteboard or piece of paper for all to see). Once chunked together, the whole sequence of events can be named (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 148).

Questions that can be used to elicit this step include:

- How did this conflict develop? What sequence of events took place?
- When they did that, what did the conflict invite you all to do in response?

- So what would you call this whole cycle of events that has gone back and forth between you all? What name could we agree on? (Winslade & Monk, 2001, 148)

This process is further supported by a deeper discussion of the history of the problem itself. Winslade and Monk (2001) state that once parties are able to separate themselves from the problem, "exploring the history of the externalized problem allows the conflict to be storied in a way that gives it an origin and a process of development and therefore, potentially, a conclusion" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 149). Moreover:

> The conflict is not the only thing that becomes historicized in this process; the relationship between the two parties becomes historicized as well. Historicizing the problem creates a context for the relationship in reference to a time when the conflict did not exist. The relational qualities that were once present can be brought to the fore in a way that rescues them from the dustbin to which they have been consigned by the dominance of the current conflict. (Winslade & Monk, 2001, pp. 149-150)

Historicizing questions include:

- How long has this dispute been in your lives?
- When did these effects of the problem first become noticeable to you?
- What's the history of the problem that is doing this to you?
- Was there a time when things were different, before this problem came along and took charge? (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 149).

Within any approach to mediation, these types of questions may be used. But the last question perhaps best exemplifies what the narrative mediator is leading up to in this process. Rather than waiting for the parties to state something that might contradict the conflict story, the mediator is actively creating space for contradictions to the dispute to be introduced, examined, and discussed. In this respect, he/she is encouraging a conversation that may not have otherwise come about if it were left entirely in the hands of the parties.

Part and parcel to the historicizing of the conflict is a deeper discussion of the effects the conflict has had on the parties. Winslade and Monk (2001) describe this as an opportunity for the narrative mediator to ask "influencing" questions (i.e., questions that get at the heart of the influence the conflict has had on the lives of the parties). They divided this into two realms: one

that explores the influence the conflict has had on the person/party and one that explores the influence the person/party has had on the conflict (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 150). While both are important, later sections of this paper will discuss the intricacies involved in protracted conflicts. For this reason, it will be important for the reader to understand how narrative mediators discuss the influence the parties have on the problem and what can germinate as a result.

At first glance, it may seem counterintuitive to examine the influence parties have had on the conflict when the point of externalization is to separate the people from the problem. But influence, in this context, means "the efforts of parties to make a dent in the problem's influence on them" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 153). This is particularly relevant to conflicts that have been on-going for some time. Winslade and Monk (2001) state:

> In mapping the influence of the problem on the parties the mediator is trying to identify the efforts parties have made to resist the influence of the conflict. They may have limited the dominance of the dispute or prevented it from damaging some areas of their relationship. They may even have had considerable success in overcoming the conflict on some occasions without due credit being given to these achievements. They may have knowledge of how to deal with the conflict that deserves to see the light of day but is currently being kept in the shadows because the argument is dominating the foreground (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 153).

Through this examination, Winslade and Monk (2001) claim, "unique outcomes" can be extracted and highlighted that contradict the preconceptions that have come to dominate the view that each party has of the other (and of the conflict in general). They also point out that such outcomes can often materialize on their own, but when they don't it becomes the responsibility of the mediator to make a deliberate attempt to flush them out (Winslade & Monk, 2001). To do this, questions like the following can be introduced:

- What actions have you taken to try to diminish the power of this conflict?
- What is the history of your relationship before this dispute? What difference does it make to recall those times?
- Have there been times in this dispute when you have allowed yourselves not to be so much under the influence of the angry cycle?

- Have there been any occasions in recent months when each of you has made a real effort to be fair to the other? How did you do that?
- Even if you have not done any of these things, have you ever thought about doing them? Intended to do things differently? Planned a different response? Expressed a desire for change? Wished that you could turn the clock back? (Winslade & Monk, 2001, pp. 154-155)

Winslade and Monk (2001) add that there is a natural propensity of those in conflict to make areas of cooperation or past agreement seem insignificant or unrelated to the conflict at hand. The point then, they argue, is for the mediator to consciously seek them out and encourage parties to question why these areas were viewed insignificantly. Questions that expand on this notion include:

- What do you think it means that you are able to cooperate in this area?
- What skills did you have to use to prevent this area of your relationship from being dragged into the conflict?
- How exactly did you work out this issue so easily? What are some principles that might be drawn from this experience that can be used to address these other, more stick issues? (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 172).

The deconstruction of the conflict story and the opening up of contradictions allows for a new story to be made. One important caveat that Winslade and Monk (2001) emphasize, however, is that simply identifying these exceptions to the conflict is not enough to warrant the creation of a new narrative of the parties. For instance:

> Each time a unique outcome is uncovered, the mediators invite some comment from each of the parties. They are being asked to perform meaning around these events, and to incorporate them into their consciousness of the relationship between them. The result of this meaning- making is that an implicit narrative of relationship, pleasing to them both, is being developed. This narrative no longer fits with the events of the dispute (Winslade et al., 1998, p. 36).

 A final step is measuring the accuracy of the narrative that has been written within the mediation to that of the conflict. Ideally, through the deconstructive process and the opening up of unique outcomes, the parties will come to see that the story they've uncovered is not really new at all. It is, in fact, the true story of their relationship. As such, it retains a kind of intrinsic value that makes committing to it much easier than committing to something manufactured out of a process that didn't touch upon the discourses that have been working against them (i.e., a theory of

conflict that doesn't emphasize the influence that social interactions have made toward inflaming

the conflict and the parties' negative perceptions from the very beginning). Winslade et al.

(1998) are clear to point out, however, that the establishment of the new narrative and the

commitment to a more harmonious relationship don't mark the end of the mediation. They add:

> Our approach to mediation converges again with the problem-solving approach in that there is still a place within our framework for the processes of generating options and then exploring those options and negotiating mutually satisfying outcomes. What is different, though, is the context. The exploring of possible agreements follows from the establishment of an alternative story (Winslade et al., 1998, p. 36).

Other Approaches With a Relational Focus

The previous sections provided an outline of the theoretical and practical components of Narrative Mediation. This section will focus on the mediation approaches that share similarities with the narrative approach, as well as a brief overview of the criticisms of the "problem-solving approach" out of which they have grown.

Transformative Mediation

In their presentation of an approach they call "Transformative Mediation", Robert Folger and Joseph Bush suggest that the ultimate goal of mediation, as typically practiced, is misdirected and claim, "The mediation practice as a whole has steadily moved toward a problem-solving orientation, and has lost sight of the transformative potential of the process on the relationships of those in conflict" (Bush & Folger, 1994, p. xvii). They argue that a new model of mediation focused on long-term change rather than on solving the immediate problems between parties is preferable. Though Bush and Folger (1994) go to great lengths to make a sharp distinction between the model of mediation they call Transformative Mediation and a conventional problem-solving, settlement-oriented model, the definition of problem-solving they use seem to suggest that none of the tools within the Transformative approach are utilized by practitioners of the problem-solving approach. For instance, under Transformative mediation, "The ideal response to conflict is to facilitate parties' empowerment and recognition of others" (Spangler, 2003). Spangler (2003) notes, "Empowerment in this context means enabling parties to define their own issues and to seek solutions on their own, while recognition means enabling parties to

see and understand the other person's point of view – to understand how they define the problem and why they seek the solution they do" (Spanger, 2003). In Christopher Moore's book, The Mediation Process, empowerment is not exclusive to the transformative approach. Moore (2003) states:

> Variations in mediator directiveness and focus can create two distinct types of mediators: Orchestrators and Dealmakers. Orchestrators generally focus on empowering parties to make their own decisions; they offer mainly procedural assistance and occasionally help in establishing or building relationships. Deal makers are often highly directive in relation to both process and substantive issues under the discussion and they are generally more prescriptive with respect to problem-solving steps. Deal makers also voice their opinion on issues under discussion, or actively work to put together a deal that will be mutually acceptable to the parties (Moore, 2003, p. 55-56).

It would seem, then, that the distinction made between transformative mediation and the problem-solving approach is based on a very rigid definition of what constitutes problem-solving mediation. Some of the differences that Bush and Folger (1994) made may be based less on the style of mediation than on mediator type. This is further emphasized in the comparisons they make between Transformative mediators and mediators in the problem-solving model. According to Spangler (2003):

> Under the transformative approach, mediators explain the concept of mediation, but let parties set goals, direct the process, design ground rules, and make it clear settlement is only one of a variety of possible outcomes. Mediators under the problem-solving model explain that the goal of the mediation is settlement, design a process to achieve settlement, set ground rules, and may or may not consult parties about these issues (Spangler, 2003).

Positioning these principles as exclusive to the transformative approach seems to ignore the fact that the same tools can be, and often are used within the problem-solving model. Spangler (2003) makes this clear in the last line by stating that a mediator "may or may not consult parties about these issues," but this leads one to question whether a distinction is even warranted when a non-transformative mediator (in the strict sense of the word) does in fact consult parties in the same manner?

Despite the debatable distinctions made between these two models, however, there are certain

characteristics of the transformative approach to mediation that make it unique. The most

obvious is the depth of attention and focus placed on the relationship of the parties involved.

Under the Transformative approach, the ability of parties to introduce and discuss nonnegotiable

issues is limitless (Spangler, 2003). Moreover, the focus of the mediation is not limited to any

particular timeline – in fact, "Mediators encourage an examination of the past as a way of

encouraging recognition of the other" (Spangler, 2003). There are also no limits on the amount

of time that parties can spend on a particular area (Spangler, 2003). The overall goal of allowing

the parties to have so much influence over the process is (in theory) to allow for a deeper

conversation, reflection, and ultimate transformation between parties than would have otherwise

come about if the goal of the mediation were to reach agreement on a specific problem. From

the transformative viewpoint, and exclusive focus on the settlement of specific problems narrows

the scope of change that is possible within the mediation process.

The most obvious concerns practitioners may have in using this approach is the loose

organization of the process and the power with which parties in conflict are given in determining

what will be discussed and agreed upon. These are not an altogether misguided concerns given

the fact that those in conflict have a propensity to bring up things that only add fuel to their fires.

The process could take much longer and become derailed, throwing the parties even further off

the course to resolution than before. From a transformative viewpoint, however, the mediator

still serves to support a healthy and safe dialogue between the parties, but curtailing the issues

that aren't conducive to negotiation unnecessarily hampers the ability of parties to get at the root

of the problems that are affecting their relationship. Unless these issues are discussed (regardless

of whether or not they support settlement) then an authentic transformation of the conflict (via "moral growth" through recognition) won't be realized.

Narrative mediation shares many things in common with the transformative approach, notably the focus on the relationship of the parties, as well as the goal to promote empowerment, recognition, and social justice that transformative mediators have focused on. Recognition in the narrative approach is achieved through the exploration and uncovering of unique outcomes (Hansen, 2003). Discovering things about the other party that add perspective to where they are coming from and what they grapple with foster the "acknowledgement and empathy for the situation and problems of the other party" that are central to recognition (Hansen, 2003). There are a few areas, however, where narrative mediation differs from transformative mediation.

In their self-critique of the transformative approach, Bush and Folger (1994) discuss the likelihood of weaker parties being "pressured or out maneuvered by stronger opponents in a style of mediation where mediators refrain from evaluating or monitoring the quality of settlements being reached" (Bush & Folger, 1994, p. 275). This ties into the issue of parties controlling the content and the process of the mediation. How does a transformative mediator address power imbalances in such circumstances? Bush and Folger's response was to position themselves in comparison to the problem-solving model and to argue that "there is no evidence to support fairness in the settlements reached by the interest-based approach" (Bush & Folger, 1994, p. 275). Bush & Folger (1994) continue, "When a mediator's role and skills are dedicated to helping parties make their own decisions on all points and not to producing solution per se, weaker parties are helped to resist pressures to accept deals they consider unacceptable" (Bush & Folger, 1994, p. 275). It seems as though there is an abiding faith in the transformative approach

that refraining from settlement discussions and focusing instead on empowerment and

recognition will protect weaker parties from being manipulated.

Under the narrative mediation model, however, power imbalances are treated much more

explicitly. According to Winslade & Monk (2001):

> Narrative mediators may state openly their opposition to violence, racism, and sexism. They may open to question what is considered the norm because the norm is a cultural product that privileges some groups of people. To be neutral and not challenge the norm may serve to support privilege. By being attentive to how systemic patterns of entitlement are featured in conflict, the mediator can make efforts to assist those whose voices are often silenced or marginalized (Winslade & Monk, 2001, pp. 100-101)

In this context, the conventional notion of mediator impartiality does not exist. Winslade and

Monk (2001) are clear to point out, however, that "doing this in a tactful manner is important if

the mediator wishes to avoid alienating the party that is in a more privileged position" (Winslade

& Monk, 2001, p. 101).

Dialogue

Much like transformative and narrative mediation, there is another common practice used by

conflict resolution practitioners that focuses more attention on the relational development of

parties rather than emphasizing the settlement of disputes. The use of "dialoguing" in

international protracted conflicts "has been used by organizations such as The Institute for Multi-

Track Diplomacy as a tool for social learning in protracted conflicts" (Maiese, 2003). The

practice of dialogue is described as:

> A kind of conversation and way of relating that differs from central modes of communication, including mediation, negotiation, discussion, and debate. It is a conversation animated by a search for understanding rather than for agreements or solutions. There is no fixed goal or predetermined agenda and the emphasis is not on resolving disputes, but, rather, on improving the way in which people with significant differences relate to each other (Maiese, 2003).

Like the deconstruction phase of narrative mediation, "Participants in dialogue explore the presuppositions, beliefs, and feelings that shape their interactions; they discover how hidden values and intentions control people's behavior and contribute to communication successes and failures" (Maiese, 2003). Maiese (2003) continues, "The process also allows for a deeper exploration of issues that would normally be omitted from the mediation process such as a discussion of how a party's own values might be incongruent with their primary beliefs" (Maiese, 2003).

The benefits of dialogue can be found in its ability to expand the scope of conflict resolution to groups and communities that may not sit at the mediation table. In so doing, public dialogue can introduce new ways of viewing the conflict, challenge stereotypes, and cast away negative attributions that each party has assigned to the other (Maiese, 2003). Moreover, it carries with it the potential to not only alter conflict on a relational level (i.e., between parties) but also the potential to alter people on an individual level by forcing them to question the positions they've held about the conflict and how they've contributed to the dispute (Maiese, 2003).

Given the similarities that exist between dialogue and narrative mediation, it may be difficult to differentiate the two. The most important distinction is that despite the fact that both are focused on transforming the relationship between conflicting parties, dialogue is not a form of mediation. It is a conversation that happens outside of a mediation or negotiation process (though some practitioners may argue that it can be used as a tool within mediation). Taken on its own, however, dialogue requires parties to commit their time to a process that "has no definite goal and often does not lead in any obvious direction" (Maiese, 2003). Moreover, Maiese (2003) points out that dialogue does not offer any protection against power imbalances, and states "It is difficult for genuine dialogue to take place between the oppressed and oppressors because an

imbalance of power can often lead to a conversation that may simply be taken over by those with greater power" (Maiese, 2003). In narrative mediation, however, special consideration is given by the mediator to support those whose voice has been (or may be) marginalized. Within dialogue, the facilitator's role in the process can be far more limited.

Another key difference between dialogue and narrative mediation is that, in the former, those chosen to participate may or likely will possess a perspective that differs from other members of the group to which they belong. According to Chasin et al. (1996), "Those chosen to participate in dialogue speak as individuals whose own unique experiences differ in some respect from others on their side, and their behavior is likely to vary in some degree and along some dimensions from stereotypical images others may hold of them" (Chasin et al., 1996, p. 323). In other words, those invited to dialogue are those who display characteristics conducive to change (i.e., they either don't entirely conform to the assumptions that the other party holds of them, or they've already displayed some sign that the perspectives they hold are not unwavering). While it is assumed within mediation that some level of agreement must be exhibited by both parties that the conflict in question needs to be resolved, doing so does not necessarily require that each party already possess some level of malleability in regard to their perspective of the conflict or their role within it. Often times it's going through the mediation process that influences this perspective.

Making these distinctions should not be interpreted as an attempt to underscore the usefulness of dialogue, so much as to emphasize that differences between dialogue and narrative mediation exist and their similarities should not blur what makes them unique.

Protracted Conflict

The previous sections highlighted the theory and practice of mediation styles that focus

largely on transforming the relationship of parties in conflict. This section will provide an

analysis of protracted conflicts (with special emphasis on what makes them unique from other

types of conflicts) and examine three cases of well-documented conflicts that share this

classification.

Some of the most common characteristics of protracted conflict are that they are "seemingly

irreconcilable, violent, of a zero-sum nature, total, and central, with the parties involved having

an interest in their continuation" (Bar-Tal, 2000, p. 353). What is more, however, is that the

scope of the conflict can often span years, decades, or even centuries … adding a historical

complexity that is understood and interpreted differently by each party to the conflict. What is

also unique about these types of conflicts, however, is that the people involved have developed a

particular type of psychology. According to Bar-Tal (2000):

> The characteristics of protracted conflict require society members to develop conditions that enable
> them to cope successfully with the conflict situation. One such condition is a psychological
> infrastructure, which consists of such elements as devotion to the society and country, high motivation
> to contribution, persistence, readiness for personal sacrifice, unity, solidarity, determination, courage,
> and maintenance of the society's objectives (Bar-Tal, 2000, p. 353).

The notion of a unique "psychological infrastructure" was further identified by Lederach (2005).

According to Lederach (2005), "What I find are three prevalent feelings among people who have

struggled to traverse and survive the geography of violence: suspicion, indifference, and

distance" (Lederach, 2005, pp. 52-53). Lederach (2005) notes:

In different settings I have often heard people repeat the following:

1. Change to move away from violence does not come easy. Anybody that says it does has not lived here.
2. Change does not come quickly. Be suspicious of anybody with a quick-fix solution. It is usually a trap.
3. The more things change, the more they remain exactly the same. Never judge a change by months or a year. At minimum, judge the change by decades if not generations.
4. Words are cheap. Don't believe promises. Don't accept offers. Don't expect a piece of paper signed by politicians to change your life.
5. To survive violence create walls and retrench. Plan to do it for a long time. Don't give your walls up easily. You will likely live to regret it. (Lederach, 2005, p. 54).

It's important to emphasize that rigidity is not an uncommon trait among people in conflict. In all manner of conflicts there will be people who demonstrate suspicion or indifference to the other party in a dispute. Within protracted conflict, however, the rigidity that is exemplified is more than just a stubborn attachment to one's view of the dispute. It's a coping mechanism that has been developed over several years and one that has been intimately linked to the ability of those engaged in the conflict to endure (Bar-Tal, 2000).

Retzinger and Scheff (2000) have identify "ideology" and "narratives" as critical components of a conflict's intractability. Retzinger and Scheff (2000) state, "The two are products of political/economic and emotional/relational interests, but the emotional/relational concerns are often ignored or poorly understood" (Retzinger & Scheff, 2000, p. 75). The key to understanding why solution or compromise consistently fails is said to be found in an exploration of the emotional/relational world of the conflict (Retzinger & Scheff, 2000, P. 76). Within Retzinger and Scheff's theory, "Relationship dynamics concern the social bonds between and within disputing parties and are manifested by isolation between the disputing groups and engulfment within each group (i.e., loyalty to the group at the expense of self)" (Retzinger & Scheff, 2000, p. 76). Emotional dynamics are described by Retzinger and Scheff (2000) as, "Interminable quarrels in which shame/anger spirals within and between the disputing parties,

with the shame component hidden from the other party and denied within the group" (Retzinger & Scheff, 2000, p. 76). In other words, Retzinger & Scheff argue that it is "denial" of shame that propels anger/violence (shame in this sense being propelled by collective humiliation from what the other group has perpetrated) (Retzinger & Scheff, 2000, pp. 76-77).

According to Retzinger and Scheff (2000):

> We learn about self through knowing others, and vice versa. Impairment of knowledge of the other damages knowledge of self, and vice versa. Our practice follows the promise that intractability arises from lack of knowledge of self and other, from denial of suffering. To begin to resolve a stuck conflict, acknowledgement of alienation and/or hidden emotions, in a way that leaves some dignity intact, is key for real negotiation to occur (Retzinger & Scheff, 2000, p. 78).

The relational and emotional complexity which surrounds protracted conflict is clearly an important part of understanding what separates it from other types of disputes. Retzinger and Scheff (2000) argue that it's not just key to understanding protracted conflicts, but learning how to address those complexities is also a critical component of reversing their effects and transforming the conflict. The following section will provide three examples of this type of conflict in Northern Ireland, Cyprus, and Georgia, and will discuss whether the attempts to negotiation a peaceful end to the conflicts in these regions have addressed the emotional/relational component that have contributed to their intractability. The discussion then returns to narrative mediation and examines how a narrative approach could contribute to their transformation.

<u>Northern Ireland</u>

Given the fact that protracted conflict has been introduced as an often violent (or potentially violent), enduring, and seemingly primordial dispute between different groups, it may seem out of place to discuss a conflict that has (at least from an official standpoint) already reached resolution. In point of fact, one might argue that the Northern Ireland conflict is a good example of how "problem-solving" or "problem-oriented" mediation can transform a dispute. To be sure, the intent of this section isn't to refute that the mediation that led to the signing of The Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998 didn't have a positive effect on the conflict. What it does critique, however, is how well the GFA has been at addressing the relational aspects of the conflict and the establishment of peace in Northern Ireland. In other words, how did the settlement reached by the parties in the mediation transform the conflict? (i.e., at what level or depth?). Moreover, is it possible that the shortcomings of the GFA are attributable to what was left out of the negotiations?

Although the level of violence that existed in Northern Ireland has diminished considerably since the signing of the GFA, evidence that disharmony between protestant and catholic communities persists is irrefutable. This has largely been attributed to the level of division that remains in the six counties, 10 years after the GFA was enacted. According to Mac Ginty et al. (2007):

> Each group has their own schools, preferred newspapers, political parties, cultural and sporting organizations, and preferred version of history that paints the out-group as untrustworthy. The language and rhetoric used in the political sphere maintains and embeds these divisions further. Given that the residential and school segregation is also high, with over 90% of people living in an area

where their group comprises the majority, one consequence is the abject failure of both groups to understand or empathize with the position of the other group (Mac Ginty et al., 2007, p. 7).

Hughes et al. (2007) add that the consequences of segregation are noteworthy, and state:

> While a causal link between segregation and conflict has not been established, there is some suggestion of a cyclical and interdependent relationship between segregation and violence. Specifically, segregation, which is often essentially a response to out-group fear and anxiety, in turn, ensures the long-term prevalence of such negative emotions by reinforcing mutual ignorance (Hughes et al., 2007, p. 36).

In other words, while it's unclear whether segregation will actually cause violence, there is

evidence to suggest that it creates an environment that is conducive to its continuation (assuming

that it was to erupt).

This fear was further articulated by Burgess et al. (2007) in a series of interviews conducted

with former rebels and civilians in Northern Ireland. According to Burgess et al. (2007):

> The segregation of communities exacerbates differences and contributes to the feeling (among all of the participants in our interviews) that the potential for future violence still exists. Despite outward appearances of a relative peace, the people of Northern Ireland are not truly living with one another. In that regard, the situation is described as being worse than ever before. With circumstances such as these the potential will exist for future conflict between groups. (Burgess et al., 2007, p. 81)

Shirlow (2003) notes the same propensity for fear in a survey of 1600 individuals living within

interface communities (areas where segregated Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods meet) in

Belfast. Shirlow (2003) states:

> A mere one in twelve people worked in areas dominated by the 'other' religion. Seventy eight percent of respondents could provide examples of at least 3 publicly funded facilities that they would not use simply because it was located on the 'wrong' side of an interface. One in eight respondents have forgone healthcare for themselves and younger members of their families because the nearest health facilities are located in areas dominated by the other community. Moreover, 88% would not enter an area dominated by the other community at night time, while a mere 18% of respondents undertook, on a weekly basis, consumption activities in areas dominated by the 'other' religion (Shirlow, 2003, p. 85-86).

When asked why they would not journey into the other community, "58.9% of respondents

attributed their hesitation to fear of either verbal or physical violence" (Shirlow, 2003, p. 86).

Interestingly, this fear was not limited strictly to the 'other' community. Respondents in Shirlow

(2003) state that, "fear of their own community was directly linked to the belief that entering areas dominated by the 'other' sectarian group would lead to individuals being 'punished' by members of their own sectarian group" (Shirlow, 2003, p. 86).

Most disturbing is the fact that segregation and the perpetuation of fear has continued within younger generations in Northern Ireland. Protestant ministers interviewed from Londonderry in Southern (2006) note the precautions undertaken by pupils from Foyle and Londonderry College (a Protestant school in a largely catholic community):

> If a student takes the bus into town (Cityside), they take off their blazer, otherwise there's a threat of being attacked – either perceived or real. He/she would not be allowed into town at all in their Foyle blazer. They'd put it in their school bag so nobody can tell what school they're from. It says a lot about how safe it is and how safe they feel (Southern, 2006, p. 519).

Southern (2006) adds that "the threat of hostility that attends the wearing of a school blazer and tie simply because they are symbols of a *de facto* Protestant school promotes a psychological condition of fear and apprehension" (Southern, 2006, p. 519).

Given the divisiveness that remains in Northern Ireland, it's not unreasonable to wonder why two communities who managed to negotiate a formal peace agreement would continue to be at odds with one another? If one were to look more closely at the way the mediation was structured, however, it becomes clear that reaching a settlement could not have transformed the conflict in its entirety. What is more, however, is that even if the settlement was a "first-step" in a more peaceful direction the missing "link" in the process has never formally been addressed (that "link" being the incorporation of the complex history and root causes of the conflict).

One of the biggest problems for a process dealing with a conflict of this size is the obvious limitations it places on party representation. As such, U.S. Senator George Mitchell (who led the negotiations) could not have been expected to mediate a conflict between each and every individual within the Catholic and Protestant communities. The alternative then was to hold

negotiations between political representatives from each community, the United Kingdom,

Ireland, and paramilitary groups (who were integral to the process if there was to be any hope for

the violence to cease). The actual structure of the negotiations was also highly strategic and is

widely regarded as the reason the mediation ultimately succeeded in reaching settlement.

According to Curran and Sebenius (2003):

> Mitchell steered the discussions almost exclusively through issues of procedure rather than through issues of substance. It took three months to establish the ground-rules for discussing procedures, one year to negotiate the procedures and a vague agenda, five months to develop an outline of items for agreement and preliminary issue statements, and a mere two weeks for Mitchell to spearhead explicit substantive negotiations toward resolution (Curran & Sebenius, 2003, p. 126).

Mitchell's justification for a focus on procedure was based largely on the high level of hostility

that existed between the parties. Curran and Sebenius (2003) note:

> An early substantive focus would likely have pushed the partisan negotiators further apart. Mitchell's strategy allowed ample time for the parties to vent their anger at the process rather than at each other or by furthering their clutching to divergent positions on the issues. It also gave the parties an opportunity to listen to each other and develop a semblance of a working relationship and some success prior to facing tough issue trade-offs. (Curran & Sebenius, 2003, p. 127)

Another important aspect of the negotiation was Mitchell's insistence on developing a deadline

for reaching agreement. Curran and Sebenius (2003) state, "The main reason for insisting on a

deadline was the fear that without one, the debate would continue to grind on and that the

process could be derailed by continuing violence and the threat of escalation" (Curran &

Sebenius, 2003, p. 216).

While a focus on the process and the establishment of a definitive deadline played favorably

in encouraging a commitment from the parties involved, it limited the depth of the negotiation to

such an extent that many have criticized the level at which change has taken place. To be fair,

the GFA has made significant contributions to improving the lives of the people of Northern

Ireland. Mac Guinty et al. (2007) emphasize, "On-the-ground conditions have improved

dramatically as a result of the peace process: the local economy grew, security restrictions

lessened, and public optimism increased. More importantly, the main militant groups are on

ceasefire, and there is little prospect of a resumption of serious violence" (Mac Ginty et al., 2007,

p. 7). What these improvements obscure, however, is that the most significant change has been

limited to institutional and structure development (Wolff, 2002, pp. 110-111 table 3). Examples

of this include equal access and opportunity to housing, the systematic reorganization of

Northern Ireland's police force, better economic opportunities, infrastructure development, etc.

While the historical absence and/or poor quality of these structural changes factored into the

plight of those embroiled in conflict, the fact that division has intensified is indicative of the fact

that the roots of the conflict have yet to be reached.

    Interestingly, both Burgess et al. (2007) and Mac Ginty et al. (2007) critique the GFA for

inadvertently reinforcing division between communities by "Legitimizing, via political power-

sharing arrangements, Catholic Nationalism and Protestant unionism" (Mac Ginty et al., 2007, p.

8).   Mac Ginty et al. (2007) note, "Evidence of this division can be seen in increasingly

polarized voting patterns obtained in post-GFA elections, with the Democratic Unionist and Sinn

Fein both outpolling more moderate parties" (Mac Ginty et al., 2007) p. 8). This was further

emphasized by respondents in Burgess et al. who state, "There are political elements and

political tendencies that have a vested interest in maintaining a culture of the community. They

have an imperative to do it because how would they go on existing unless they convince people

of the historical victimization of their community and the legitimacy of their part in the

conflict?" (Burgess et al., 2007, p. 77).

    It would seem that the emotional and relational complexity of the conflict in Northern Ireland

was virtually ignored by the negotiations that took place. This is reflected in the absence of the

historical grievances that have contributed to the conflict and the lack of any mention of an

attempt to create a collective identity within the GFA. It is also evidenced by the fact that the Mitchell mediation spent less time discussing the details of the conflict than creating an environment of procedural cooperation between parties (parties who, it has been argued, have had a political interest in keeping the people of Northern Ireland divided). What the GFA does declare, however, is that what has been negotiated offers a "historic opportunity for a new beginning" and a "fresh start" (Good Friday Agreement, Declaration of Support section). The question that remains, then, is whether a fresh start or new future is really possible when the perspectives both communities have of the past remain so divergent?

    There were several considerations that Mitchell's strategy didn't address. By his own admission, Mitchell has stated that he was often frustrated by his inability to discuss the more substantive issues surrounding the conflict (Mitchell, 1999). While it's important to be realistic about what could adequately be discussed within the political parameters that had been set for Mitchell, it is equally important to recognize that what was achieved by the GFA was an end to the level of violence that had been plaguing Northern Ireland, not a resolution to the conflict itself.

    One of the most daunting aspects of the conflict in Northern Ireland (as with any protracted conflict) is the attachment disputants have to history. Lederach (2005) notes, "In my first visit to Belfast, I toured the different neighborhoods of the city and recall the murals that stood out. They supported heroes and denigrated enemies, which from one street to the next would switch perspective" (Lederach, 2005, p. 134) Lederach (2005) continues, "The past was alive, in fact, literally circulating in the streets each year in the parading season when violence would erupt around who had the right to remember what date in history, in which way, and on whose geography … Ancestral domain was walking and talking in the streets of Belfast" (Lederach,

2005, p. 134). From an outsider's perspective, mediating the past may seem like an impossible task given the fact that the origin of a conflict may differ by the accounts of each party, or, it has become so blurred that a discussion of its history may only serve as a catalyst to further disagreement. In the Northern Ireland conflict, however, the incorporation of the history of the conflict through narratives may be the key to unlocking the division that has persisted between Protestants and Catholics.

A Narrative Approach to Northern Ireland

   For those of us not embroiled in deep conflict, the notion of conflict narratives can seem a bit contrived. It's difficult to see how a dispute between colleagues or an argument between two neighbors is indicative of the telling of a story about their relationship. In Northern Ireland, however, narratives can be seen and heard. They're witnessed in the elaborate sectarian murals painted on the backs of houses and buildings and are named whenever we hear someone refer to "The Troubles." So deep do these narratives run that one can't look at Northern Ireland on a map without attaching it to the conflict that has played such a significant role within its borders.

   From a narrative mediator's perspective, one of the things that has prevented the people of Northern Ireland from progressing from settlement to peace is the fact that attempts to develop an alternative story have not succeeded in competing with or supplanting the preferred conflict narrative. This was recognized by the respondents in Burgess et al., "People really get to like their own conflict … It's what defines us in Northern Ireland, it's what makes us interesting … If it wasn't for the conflict, what a boring people we would be" (Burgess et al., 2007, p. 82). Burgess et al. (2007) continue, "An additional problem in Northern Ireland is that the rest of the world, through news reporting, defines the people in terms of the conflict" (Burgess et al., 2007,

p. 82). The impetus for the narrative mediator would then be to help the parties rewrite the

conflict narrative and make it parasitic to the "real" story of the relationship that has grown since

the troubles (and has existed throughout the conflict).

While the GFA emphasizes the need to rebuild civil society and fight the impediments to

integration, it has focused primarily on the tangible barriers to cooperation, such as the physical

removal of loyalist and nationalist murals and flags. While these are positive steps forward, they

fail to take into account that the murals are symptomatic of something that cannot by deleted

from the subconscious of those who put the murals there in the first place. This point was

recognized by Shirlow (2003) who states, "The reality that there are no policies directly linked to

recognizing the existence of sectarianized fears is located in the 'policy blindness' and indeed

resistance of government departments to challenge the edifice of sectarian opposition" (Shirlow,

2003, p. 90). To expect the people of Northern Ireland to form an improved relationship without

a more direct attempt to challenge the narratives that have reinforced so much distrust and

destruction, seriously undermines the effectiveness of all of the structural changes the GFA has

sought.

One of the benefits the narrative mediation approach offers in a context such as this is that

history is evoked with a particular emphasis on the discursive elements that have been

influencing the parties all along (i.e., the social, societal, or political influences that shape their

interactions). This helps to deconstruct history in such a way that the actions each party has

undertaken are viewed in a new light, one in which the parties' responses were based on

assumptions of need rather than an assumed legitimate response. The notion of "need" is not

understood in the same way in the narrative model, however. According to Winslade and Monk

(2001):

> Interest-based problem-solving models address the issues that conflict parties feel are unfair or unjust by seeking out possible compatible interests and needs in an attempt to help diffuse conflict. Need, from this perspective, is viewed as a fundamental characteristic and arises naturally. We disagree. We argue that the majority of people's psychological, social, and emotional needs are constructed within the sociopolitical landscape. We see human need as discursively constructed in the form of entitlements … Entitlements which lend themselves more readily to scrutiny, debate, and challenge. (Winslade & Monk, 2001, pp. 97-96)

Within the GFA negotiations, there was no examination of "entitlements." Needs were assumed to be legitimate. It may be argued that questioning the notion of "need" would throw the mediator into a precarious situation (i.e., instead of being a neutral party, he/she will be seen as having assigned judgment/blame to the parties). Winslade and Monk (2001) point out, however, that blame can be avoided by "focusing on how discourses of entitlement restrain a person's ability to demonstrate fairness and equity in dealing with another person." (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 106). In other words, the parties were bound by assumptions that influenced a particular response, which in turn served to add fuel to any already burning fire. This serves to deconstruct the conflict and help reinforce the notion that the two communities were pitted against each other by false assumptions that influenced their individual actions. The point here is not to judge whether the "need" is wrong or right, but to encourage the parties to reevaluate whether that "need" was truly intrinsic. Moreover, it encourages them to examine whether the pursuit of that "need" resulted in a situation that was anathema to their preference for a more peaceful relationship (assuming, of course, that that is their preference).

The narrative approach also identifies something that has largely been ignored by official mediation attempts: The need to re-author an alternative collective narrative that challenges the conflict-story, and undermines any notion that the relationship between Protestants and Catholics is one that must always be dominated by animosity. The potential for this exists in the narrative approach's emphasis on identifying "new outcomes." Hughes et al. (2007) note that the potential

for identifying positive experiences between the two groups can have a profound effect on the

parties relationship. According to Hughes et al. (2007):

> In the same way that negative prior experience of the outgroup had an apparently detrimental effect on willingness to make contact; it seems that more positive experiences in the past correlate with greater willingness to make contact in the present. Older residents from both communities who were friends with outgroup members prior to the outbreak of 'the troubles' in 1969, remembered former relationships with fondness and lamented the fact that the conflict had driven them apart (Hughes et al., 2007, p. 44).

The narrative approach, of course, takes this a bit further by actively seeking out such

experiences through inquiry, and also by "historicizing" the conflict in such a way as to uncover

attempts that both communities have made at reversing the effects of the conflict. In this

approach, any experience (regardless of how small) in which the conflict didn't dominate the

relationship between the parties is fodder for exploration and discussion. Actively seeking new

outcomes serves to contradict the established narrative and provide an avenue for a new narrative

to emerge. Hughes et al. (2007) note that the potential for a positive relationship can also exists

in cases in which parties can recall both positive and negative experiences. In such

circumstances, Hughes et al. state (2007), "The positive seemed predominant in terms of current

disposition towards the other. One woman had been burned out of her home in a mainly

Protestant area, but had positive experiences working with Protestants in a mixed environment

and counted Protestants amongst her friends, indicating a strong inclination to trust Protestants"

(Hughes et al., 2007, p. 44).

   The need to highlight the positive steps each party has made to end the conflict is particularly

important in the context of violence. One of the drawbacks to the GFA is that it was seen to

have occurred largely because of increasing violence (i.e., violence was a successful means to an

end, and, quite puzzlingly, the key ingredient for peace). Burgess et al. (2007) note, "Some

participants saw the GFA as a direct result of a lot of the violent action as well as the more

peaceful action, and one participant suggested that every person who was injured or killed made

a difference in the overall context of the situation" (Burgess et al., 2007, p. 75). Allowing

violence to be seen as legitimate in this context does nothing to undermine the actions that were

taken to increase conflict. For that matter, it does not support the notion that the conflict

narrative was the problem (it allows each party to continue viewing the other side as the

aggressor). Repudiating violence is not enough – there must be an explicit attempt to connect

the narrative of the mediation/negotiation to the new and preferred narrative that has emerged

from the two groups. The mediation should be regarded as a natural byproduct of that story –

not a result of the violence that was supported by the conflict narrative.

What the peace agreement in Northern Ireland represents is something Lederach has ascribed

as a general misconception surrounding peace accords. Lederach (2005) states:

> Most peace accords are not solutions in content but proposed negotiated processes, which if followed,
> will change the expression of the conflict and provide avenues for redefining relationships. However,
> when peace accords are broached in protracted conflicts nobody wants to be quite so blunt as to say,
> "The agreement represents processes for continuing the conflict under new definitions." The
> prevailing image creates a significant meaning structure that suggests that the conflict is over, and the
> image of "agreement" lends itself to that desire (Lederach, 2005, p. 46).

Mitchell never regarded the peace process as complete. This is clear within the body of the

GFA, with the emphasis placed on promoting social inclusion and increasing community

development. Peace was seen as something that would come with time, once the changes agreed

upon within the GFA were implemented. The drawback to this, however, is that it was largely

left in the hands of political leaders and the people of Northern Ireland without any strategic

examination of the conflicted relationship that had caused The Troubles in the first place. What

is more is that even if there were no room for such a discussion in Mitchell's negotiation, there

was no formal attempt at determining where the relational or emotional complexities could be

addressed. As a result, the job of addressing the more intimate aspects of the conflict has been left in the hands of grassroots organizations.

Despite the existence of several community-based organizations Wolff notes that there has been slow growth in cross-communal civil society organizations since the GFA (Wolff, 2002, p. 111 table 3). Cochrane's assessment of community-based conflict resolution organizations also indicates that within the organizations that do exist, a very distinct mantra is evident. According to Cochrane (2000):

> Cross-community reconciliation organizations advocate a more behavioral model, arguing that politically motivated violence was a consequence of the creation of negative stereotypes (rather than structural motivators such as flawed political systems, incompatible ethnic goals, and physical division), which could best be tackled through inter-community contact, dialogue and communication. There is also an emphasis on the need to address economic deprivation, and the social, political and cultural causes of community alienation (Cochrane, 2000, pp. 13-14).

Despite the emphasis on the relational components of the conflict between the two communities, however, cross-community conflict resolution organizations and single-identity conflict resolution organizations in Northern Ireland have all tended to converge on one particular aspect in their approaches. Cochrane (2000) notes:

> The one uniting factor, which binds all conflict resolution organizations together, is the emphasis on the present and future rather than the past. There is a clear effort to concentrate on how to move out of the conflict, rather than to come to any definitive conclusions as to why it exists or what its underlying causes might be. At first glance this is odd, as these organizations seek to engage in conflict resolution yet they do not (for the most part) have a very closely defined sense of why that conflict exists, other than the most primitive terms. (Cochrane, 2000, p. 14)

Cochrane (2000) adds that the reasoning behind this lack of attention to the causes of the conflict is largely due to the fact that the organizations are influenced by the "symptoms" of the conflict, which are more "tangible," rather than the causes, which are historical and much harder to see.

Critiques of the propensity with which attempts to resolve the conflict have focused on the present and the future should not be viewed as an error on the part of those engaged in conflict resolution, or that focusing on the present and future necessarily precludes the ability to reach

resolution. What the previous section has attempted to examine, however, is whether a focus on

the present and future is necessarily helpful in protracted conflicts where history still plays an

integral role in the dispute. The previous section also explored whether the fact that division has

remained in Northern Ireland (despite a comprehensive peace accord) is indicative of there

having been a failure to thoroughly deconstruct the conflict as a part of encouraging a new

relationship between the two communities to emerge. Evidence of this was found in the

continued attachment to the conflict narrative by respondents in Burgess et al. Moreover, while

the focus on process in the Mitchell negotiations may have helped to foster an agreement

between the representatives of the two sides, leaving the substantive matters to the end (without

any formal recognition of the need to address the relational component of the causes of the

conflict) has hindered the ability of the people of Northern Ireland to achieve a deeper

transformation of the conflict.

Cyprus

Unlike the case of Northern Ireland, the Greek-Cypriots (GC) and the Turkish-Cypriots (TC) on the island of Cyprus have never been able to reach a formal peace agreement. From a purely structural standpoint, however, the similarities between the two conflicts may seem remarkable. Michael (2007) notes that there are five interrelated levels of linkage politics operating within the Cyprus conflict: the local (referring to each of the two antagonistic communities), the national (that is, Cyprus as a whole), the subregional (understood as the Cyprus-Greece-Turkey triangle), the regional (which encompasses its EU, Southern European and Middle Eastern contexts), and the international (which includes all other external actors, not least the United Nations) (Michael, 2007, p. 588). In the Northern Ireland conflict, similar linkages within those levels could also be found: the local (Protestants and Catholic communities), the national (Northern Ireland as a whole), the subregional (Northern Ireland-Ireland-United Kingdom), the international (the US). Various scholars, politicians, and conflict resolution practitioners have tended to look to NI for clues as to how a formal resolution of the conflict could be reached in a highly complex political environment. Unfortunately, however, more than three decades of attempts to implement a peace agreement has failed to reverse the intractability of the Cyprus problem. The conflict has continued to defy every traditional and conventional approach that has been applied to it.

The most recent attempt at resolution in Cyprus was UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's initiative for a comprehensive peace settlement. Submitted in separate referendums to the TC

and GC communities in April 2004 (after failing to garner the formal support of GC leadership in

negotiations over the terms of the initiative) the Annan Plan was approved by 65 per cent of TCs

but was rejected by 76 per cent of the GC community (International Crisis Group, 2008). Given

the complex nature of the Cyprus conflict (and the multiple actors involved), to claim that the

process failed for any one particular reason would be highly simplistic. The purpose of this

paper, however, is to critically examine how the mediation process may have contributed to its

failure. It is important to note that a reorganization of the conflict resolution strategies alone

would not be enough to inspire a full transformation of the dispute. What it might highlight,

however, is one of the steps needed to reverse the intractability of the conflict.

From a "mediative" standpoint, the collapse of the Annan Plan can largely be attributed to the

inability of the mediation to foster trust between the two communities, and to address the socio-

psychological aspects of the conflict that influenced the parties' mindsets upon entering the

negotiations. Michael (2007) attributes this largely to the UN's past methodology of handling

negotiations (Michael, 2007, p. 594). According to Michael (2007):

> The organization's conservative diplomatic style and bureaucratic/cultural/structural obstacles to
> change saw the UN wedded to a formal legalistic approach to intercommunal negotiations. Despite its
> activism, the UN was unable to adopt innovative and imaginative ideas, let alone negotiating strategies
> and approaches that might have emphasized common interests and mutual benefits (Michael, 2007, p.
> 594).

The rigidity of the mediation was further influenced by the strict adherence to a timeline (which

coincided with Cyprus' impending accession into the European Union (EU)) and the lack of

input by members of both communities in the negotiation process (reminiscent of the way the

GFA was structured in Northern Ireland). Unlike the GFA, however, the Annan negotiations

incorporated political elites from communities who by-and-large had no contact with one

another. This was strictly enforced by the cease-fire "Green Line" that divides that island in two,

with TCs living in the North (and represented by the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern

Cyprus (TRNC)) and GCs in the South (governed by the internationally recognized Republic of

Cyprus). The significance the separation had on the mediation process is that the leadership of

both communities has largely been able to function independent from the other. In the NI

conflict, the two communities had not established their own governments. Any potential

settlement between the two groups in Cyprus would have to instill the same level of

independence/sovereignty that already existed for both communities if it were to avoid outright

rejection.

What makes the Annan negotiations so interesting is the focus on compromise and bargaining

without any explicit mention of trust. Although the details of the plan called for the

establishment of a federal system on the island with the majority of power allocated to two

constituent states (each comprised of TCs and GCs), the GCs rejected the plan citing that it did

not "adequately address their concerns regarding military threats and eventual secession of the

north" (International Crisis Group, 2006). According to International Crisis Group, an

independent, non-governmental organization (NGO) recognized as the world's leading

independent, non-partisan, source of analysis and advice to governments:

> The Annan Plan, of course, had its deficiencies, as any agreement based on compromise does, but it was the only realistic possibility for a viable settlement. There certainly remains room for improvement on a number of the details of the Annan Plan, but looked at from the outside it seems clear that if the will to reunify the island had really existed … the GC population could have been persuaded by the many mutual benefits of the plan. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the states' concerns about TC political influence in a future united Cyprus were more the products of an unwillingness to share power with the other major community on the island than of genuine problems with the proposed system, carefully negotiated as it had been over many years (International Crisis Group, 2006).

When viewed from this angle it would appear that the plan itself might not have been the real

issue involved with the GCs ultimate rejection, so much as it was their unwillingness to engage

in a settlement of the conflict.

Although many conflict resolution practitioners would argue that the willingness to engage in mediation is not something that can or should be compelled (i.e., that it should be a natural response by both parties arising from a desire to end their conflict), building trust within the mediation itself (between the parties and the mediator) can play a large role in garnering the parties' sincere commitment to the process and to the options identified. In the Annan mediation, however, the emphasis on bargaining proved to be a serious setback. According to Richmond (1998), "A bargaining style approach may well lead to a situation where neither side is willing to make major concessions because it feels that it is losing more than it will potentially gain" (Richmond, 1998, p. 52). This is especially true in a conflict where the two parties have spent decades completely segregated from one another, with a long history of failed attempts at negotiating peace. The inability of the two sides to recognize mutual gains was further articulated by Secretary General Annan when he observed that "both parties perceived the negotiations to be a zero-sum game: One side's gain was the other side's loss" (Drath, 2003, p. 307).

When peace talks unravel there is a common tendency to blame the mediator responsible for their progression. In the Cyprus conflict, however, leaders of the two communities have often been accused of holding intransient positions in regard to an actual resolution of the conflict. According to Richmond (1998):

> Varying levels of blame for the protracted nature of the UN peacemaking process must be attributed to the Cypriot disputants themselves, who have found it expedient to look the other way for as long as the status quo appeared to be stable. As a consequence of this, the process of UN peacemaking has simply become one of maintaining the status quo around the negotiating table in order to preserve stability on the island and in the region (Richmond, 1998, p. 247).

At the same time, however, Richmond (1998) also points out that the UN's approach to the conflict has allowed the disputants to do this from the very beginning. Richmond (1998) notes:

One of both sides' complaints about UN peacemaking is that the Secretary-General has not properly defined the problem. The reason for this is that it was improperly defined in the original Security Council resolution which itself was the result of complex negotiations. It is patently clear that its aim was to prevent the situation in Cyprus from spreading and that little regard was given to solving the intercommunal problems of the Cypriots or to setting up a situation in which peacemaking could flourish. This, and the continuation of the interests which were formative in the negotiations, has meant that the problem and its actors have never been properly diagnosed. (Richmond, 1998, pp. 228-229)

The Annan initiative invited two adversarial parties (like many official attempts before it) into a process of conflict resolution based largely upon mutual compromise, without directly addressing the breakdown of their relationship or the root causes of their conflict with one another. Compromise, in this particular instance, would be gained by the realization by both parties that it would be in their best interest to cooperate. As previously indicated, however, the stability of conflict and current degree of sovereignty has only served to make each party feel as though they are in a better position not to choose a resolution that might threaten what they already have. Drath (2003) notes that this "threat" has its roots in the two communities differing perceptions of the events that led to the 1963 constitutional amendments proposed by the GC (which, according to TCs, led to a severe loss of government representation and discriminatory treatment) and the 1974 Turkish military intervention which led to the partitioning of Cyprus.

What also contributed to the difficulty of reaching a resolution of the conflict under the Annan initiative was the fact that the referendum was instituted without GC leadership support and without any cross-community contact or public participation in the process. Both Michael (2007) and Anastasiou (2007) note that GC leader Tassos Papadopoulos influenced the outcome of the referendum (though with differing perceptions of the extent) by capitalizing on the fear that was already prevalent among the GC community. According to Anastasiou (2007):

Papadopoulos influenced the outcome of the referendum in two interrelated schemes. First, he tapped into the dormant old nationalist memory and sentiments of the GC community, stirring, reactivating, and amplifying nationalism to the point of saturating the public domain and thus asphyxiating the pro-solution voices. Second, he reawakened and reintegrated the GC's sense of victimization back into

the nationalist framework, thus re-associating the GC's sense of injustice to the typical reactionary culture of adversarial nationalism (Anastasiou, 2007, p. 199).

Anastasiou (2007) adds that the GC's vote had less to do with the content of the plan than with the negative images that were instilled by the GC leader. According to Michael (2007), however, attributing the "no" vote exclusively to Papadopoulos obscures another important factor:

> Deeper scrutiny reveals that polarization is a by-product of the negotiating culture. Both the way the proposals were conducted and the way the proposals were framed reinforced communalism at the expense of individualism (e.g., by stressing communal quotas, resettlement limitations, separate elections and property rights) (Michael, 2007, p. 599).

In other words, what was missing from the mediation was an attempt to bring the two sides closer together. The emphasis instead was on making it easier for them to live independently of one another.

A Narrative Approach to Cyprus

While Cyprus and Northern Ireland have often been viewed as sharing many of the traits that make a conflict protracted in nature, the two also share an incredible amount of "unstoried experiences" (unstoried experience in this instance being experiences that run counter to the dominant narrative of the conflict). Although the GC voted overwhelmingly against the Annan Plan, Georgiades (2007) and Danielidou and Horvath (2006) note in recent surveys since the referendum that GCs are willing to coexist with TCs. According to Georgiades (2007), "Greek Cypriots were more willing to cohabit with Turkish Cypriots than with Turkish immigrants, and in terms of cultural, victimization, and human-rights issues, attributed negative qualities were stronger for Turkish immigrants" (Georgiades, 2007, p. 417). Danielidou and Horvath (2006) also found in their study that "only one-fifth of respondents reported mistrust towards TCs and only one-sixth were pessimistic that they cannot coexist peacefully with them" (Danielidou &

Horvath, 2006, p. 578). What is more is that while the "no" vote seemed to reinforce the status-quo, "The present findings are consistent with the conclusion that the Greek Cypriots rejection of the plan was not a rejection of reconciliation or reunification" (Georgiades, 2007, p. 583).

Hadjipavlou (2007) notes that the two communities' history of conflict and isolation has also been shared by a history of "coexistence in mixed villages and towns" (Hadipavlou, 2007, p. 359). Moreover, the separateness that exists on the island has been carefully reinforced through nationalist campaigns and fallacious historical accounts promoted by each community's education system. According to Hadjipavlou (2007), "Over 80% of respondents from both communities believed that the nationalism of both communities shared a significant amount of responsibility for the creation and perpetuation of conflict, and two-thirds of TCs and GCs believed that the different values and beliefs cultivated by the separate education systems influenced the creation and perpetuation of the conflict" (Hadjipavlou, 2007, p. 361).

What the findings in each of these surveys indicate is that the primordial or seemingly fundamental nature of the conflict as having always existed between the two groups is contradicted by the personal accounts of each disputant. When asked about the relationship between TCs and GCs and the root causes of the conflict, there were a number of instances in which blame was shifted from the other community and assigned to a number of other influences. What is also significant is that there is general recognition by each party that the proliferation of conflict can be attributed to the prevalence of national narratives circulating within the school system (Hadjipavlou, 2007). According to Hadjipavlou (2007):

> The children grow up feeling they are Greeks or Turks, not Cypriots. The narrative about the 'chosen past' and the antagonistic interpretations of events have been important aspects of their socialization, which promoted the 'enemy image' as it centered around nationalism and the perception of what constitutes a 'bad Turk' or a 'bad Greek', without much differentiation between Greek and Turkish Cypriots (Hadjipavlou, 2007, pp. 360-361).

Hadjipavlou (2007) claims, however, that the recognition on the part of TCs and GCs that nationalism has contributed to the conflict and the fact that "60% of respondents from both communities believe that the extensive use of 'motherland' symbols bears responsibility for the conflict' is indicative of there being a desire on the part of both communities to move away from nationalistic identities toward an shared 'Cypriot' culture" (Hadipavlou, 2007, p. 362).

The fact that TCs and GCs have a history of mixed levels of cooperation (prior to the 1974 partition) creates an excellent opportunity for a narrative mediator to extract unique outcomes that contradict the negative stereotypes that have circulated. Making a conscious effort to examine those experiences in relation to the experiences they've had since the partition would allow TCs and GCs to differentiate between what they know to be true through personal accounts, and what they've perceived to be true about members from the other community (perceptions that have largely been informed by stereotypes and negative assumptions about the other's actions). Moreover, exploring new outcomes would allow the forgotten positive aspects of their history to be reincorporated into the new narrative. Making this link is important for any notion of a new future for Cyprus to seem like a natural progression, rather than some artificial prescription. The trouble with this, however, is that for those born after 1974, the same personal accounts that challenge those negative opinions aren't available. This contradicts any notion that the best bet for transcending conflict lies in a new generation of TCs and GCs (particularly when cross community contact has been so limited and the education system of both communities has reinforced negative images of the other community).

That being said, however, the opportunity for transformation still exists for parties without a history of contact. Exploring the nationalist culture that has influenced each party's perception of the other would allow the parties to examine where many of their opinions have emanated

from. Moreover, since the narrative focus is not on the "interests" of the parties so much as it is on the cultural and historical influences that have shaped those supposed "interests", the narrative mediator would be able to engage the parties in a discussion of what has led each community to believe that they need the things that are being negotiated. To be clear, this isn't an attempt to implant doubt or to deny those needs (which is something the mediator will have to be careful of) so much as it is an opportunity for the parties to understand why they've come to the conclusions they have, and an opportunity for each party to absorb what has influenced its decisions. In some instances, it may very well be that the parties' options were constrained by outside influences. In others, it may promote a deeper understanding and recognition by the other party that what has influenced those interests is entirely legitimate. The fact that many Greek and Turkish Cypriots already agree that nationalism has contributed to the conflict makes it a little easier for the narrative mediator to explore the notion that the people of Cyprus have been influenced by social and cultural discourses. Incorporating this in the mediation process may strike a deeper chord for those who have been frustrated by approaches that merely scratched the surface of the conflict.

There are an abundance of social-psychological and cultural considerations that have influenced the perceptions of both parties in Cyprus. According to Hadjipavlou (2007), "These social psychological factors have not been referred to in the official talks." (Hadjipavlou, 2007, p. 363). What is clear from research and Cyprus scholars, however, is that the events of 1963 and 1974 continue to be referenced as reasons neither party can or should trust the other. From a narrative viewpoint, the usefulness of mediation is minimized without an investigation of what led to those events, what they were fueled by, how they were experienced by each party, and finally some discussion of how those events have continued to influence the relationship-story of

the Cypriot people (TC and GC alike). To be clear, the focus on such an examination isn't on

"facts" so much as on the break down of discourse between the two groups and their individual

stories of the conflict.

   The need to strengthen trust is obvious. International Crisis Group has identified the

importance of fostering confidence-building measure for both parties in future negotiations.

They also note, however, that "any attempt to negotiate them, other than squarely in the context

of serious dialogue and big issues, is likely to be fruitless, and even counterproductive."

(International Crisis Group, 2006, p. 24). Instead, they suggest that the best alternative is to

encourage "unilateral" moves by each community, with the hope that cooperation might be

fostered through the "reconstitution of bicommunal contacts and activities" (International Crisis

Group, 2006, p. 22). According to International Crisis Group (2006), "Action should also be

taken to develop and implement inter-communal reconciliation at the government or civil society

level to bridge the contrasting historical narratives of the two communities, irregardless of a

comprehensive peace agreement" (International Crisis Group, p. 22). Narrative mediation is

well positioned to take on such a task, and should be considered a necessary step in promoting

conciliatory behavior between disputants before any formal settlement negotiations.

<u>Georgia</u>

The previous cases illustrated a number of ways that the narrative approach to mediation can be useful in addressing the relational gaps that exist in settlement oriented negotiation. While Georgia is another case where the narrative approach may be useful, a number of recent events in the region warrant a closer examination of the impediments to a narrative implementation (and to mediation in general). This section also attempts to highlight areas where a focus on narrative mediation might still be useful in building confidence between the parties involved (assuming that the aforementioned impediments are first addressed).

Much like the conflicts in Northern Ireland and Cyprus, the conflict in the Republic of Georgia involves multiple actors and various disputes that have become interrelated. That is to say, while the conflict in the region has historically been about the struggle for independence of two distinct breakaway regions within Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and the republic's claim on those territories, there is also conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation over the Kremlin's continued economic and military support of the separatist states. Moreover, post-soviet Georgia has gained international recognition as a sovereign country, and has sought membership with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) while simultaneously garnering the support of the United States and members of the European Union (EU). Georgia's accession to NATO membership is something Russia has long opposed. The history is complex, and this paper does not attempt to include a thorough examination of it. What is included,

however, is an examination of the perceptions of some of the major parties that have influenced

the outcome of past negotiations and a discussion of how well those perceptions are suited for a

narrative approach.

Since the 1992 and 1994 ceasefires between Georgian and Russian governments (and the

separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia) the conflict in the Republic of Georgia has

largely been referred to as a "frozen conflict." The term itself, however, is a bit of a misnomer.

In an interview with EurasiaNet, Peter Semneby, the EU special representative for the South

Caucasus, highlighted the importance of avoiding the term "frozen conflict", stating:

> The term implies that these conflicts are not really very dangerous. Instead of implying that the conflicts are just below the freezing point, I would say that they are just below the boiling point. They are, rather, simmering conflict, where any situation, any incident can actually lead to a very dangerous escalation (2008, May 15). *EurasiaNet.*

The recent reengagement of Georgian and Russian military forces has only reinforced this

notion, moving what had seemed like sporadic feuds over airspace and territory violations in the

past few years into telltale signs of mounting animosity. Given the current upsurge of violence, a

narrative approach to mediation would seem inappropriate in an environment where the lives of

civilians are threatened by strategic bombings and open warfare. In such instances, the need to

reinforce the ceasefire agreements is (and should be) regarded as the first step in the process of

addressing the conflict. Interestingly, however, a preliminary look at the perceptions of the

parties involved and the previous attempts to negotiate peace in the region (at a time when the

1992 and 1994 ceasefires were still in effect) shows that the theory of narrative mediation

resonates strongly with the relational dynamics of the conflict. But the conflict also introduces

some unique challenges.

Since 1992, negotiations between Georgia and the separatist regions have failed to forge a

comprehensive peace agreement. A closer examination of the negotiation process reveals,

however, that the failure to do so can be largely attributed to the fact that trust between the

parties has never been established in the way talks have been organized or issues have been

addressed. Negotiations between Georgia and South Ossetia have largely been held through a

Joint Control Commission (JCC), comprised of Georgian, Russian, and North and South

Ossetian representatives (International Crisis Group, 2007). According to International Crisis

Group, "The JCC was tasked to supervise observance of the agreement, draft and implement

conflict settlement measures, promote dialogue, devise and carry out measures to facilitate

refugee and IDP return, solve problems related to economic reconstruction and monitor human

rights" (International Crisis Group, 2007, p. 1). International Crisis Group (2007) continues:

> The diplomatic breakdown of the JCC is closely linked to the inability of the parties to agree on the conflict's root causes. Georgia sees the conflict as political, possibly territorial, but not ethnic, not between Georgians and Ossetians, but rather between Georgia and Russia (International Crisis Group, 2007, p. 9).

Interestingly, Russia's involvement within the JCC has been to facilitate negotiations between

Georgia and South Ossetia (International Crisis Group, 2007). Given the level of animosity

between Russia and Georgia, it's not surprising that the Georgian government would be reticent

to agree to any potential proposals in a setting where the assumed primary protagonist is

influencing the resolution process. As a result of this, Georgia has repeatedly asked for format

changes within the JCC to create a more balanced environment (International Crisis Group,

2007). South Ossetia has been less inclined to support such a proposal and sees Georgia as

trying to "squeeze Russia out and destroy the only functioning negotiating mechanism"

(International Crisis Group, 2007, p. 10).

    Much like the conflict in South Ossetia, Georgia has viewed the Abkhazian conflict as one

that has been heavily influenced by Russia's desire to annex Georgia's territorial claim over the

region (International Crisis Group, 2007). Abkhazians, however, have focused on Georgia's

growing nationalism and strength, as well as a deep fear of their "cultural and ethnic

disappearance within Georgia that lies partly in the Soviet period" (Lynch, 2004, p.27).

According to Kvarchelia (1998):

> Until 1931, Abkhazia was a full union republic within the USSR, and it had a special treaty-based relationship with Georgia. Under Stalin's dictate in 1931, and over the strong protests of Abkhazians, the union republic was demoted to a mere 'autonomous republic' to be incorporated into Georgia. The change in status of Abkhazia, and the period that followed it, are historically remembered by Abkhazians as the policy of 'Georgianization' and persecution (Kvarchelia, 1998, p. 19).

A closer examination of the organization of negotiations between Georgia and Abkhazia will

reveal a striking similarity between it and the JCC. According to International Crisis Group

(2007), "Since 1997, the sides have met within the UN-chaired Geneva Peace Process, which is

facilitated by Russia, with the participation of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in

Europe (OSCE), and observed by the Group of Friends, including France, the UK, the U.S.,

Russia and Germany" (International Crisis Group, 2007, p. 3). Much like within the JCC, Russia

has been used an intermediary rather than being viewed as a participant of the conflict

(something Georgia has repeatedly objected to).

Clearly, the neutrality of Russia is suspect in the eyes of Georgia. Regardless of whether or

not this is true, it has and will continue to affect the ability of Georgia to engage and commit to

mediation attempts where Russia is not included as a party to the conflict, but, rather, is used as a

facilitator of dialogue. What is equally concerning, however, is the disagreement over the basic

root causes of the conflict and the high level of distrust that has grown as a result of Georgia's

focus on Russia (rather than on the separatist states). This leads to the question of how best to

apply narrative mediation when the primary protagonists in each story of the conflict differ? (i.e.,

it's not a 'simple' case of Georgia being the bad guy or the separatist states being the instigators

… there is a third entity which is recognized by one party and not the others). At first glance this

may seem to complicate the ability to deconstruct each narrative, but it also presents an

opportunity for each party to see how its assumptions and perceptions have negatively impacted its interaction with the other.

For instance, International Crisis Group (2007) notes that Georgia has asked for "increased direct dialogue with the Abkhaz, but has treated the de facto authorities as Russian puppets rather than as legitimate partners representing Abkhazia's current residents" (International Crisis Group, 2007, p. 6). The notion that Georgia views the authority of the separatist states as illegitimate was further emphasized in EurasiaNet. According to an interview with Georgian Peacekeeping Operations Chief-of-Staff Brigadier General Mamuka Kurashvili, Kurashvili stated (in response to a suggestion that Georgia sign "a non-use-of-force agreement" with South Ossetia in order to cease the current stand-off between Georgian and Russian military forces) that "These people [South Ossetians] don't have their own opinion … How can they be considered a side [to the conflict] when they don't have a position?" (2008, August 7). *EurasiaNet.* It could be argued that a failure to recognize the assumption that separatist states are political pawns has further complicated the ability of Georgia to forge a working relationship with Abkhazians and South Ossetians, thereby creating an environment ripe for Russia to be viewed as their protector and ally (rather than an additional protagonist). A narrative approach would explore Georgia's assumptions more directly, and critically examine the influence those assumptions have had on the conflict. More importantly, it would allow Georgia to examine how the perceptions it has formed about Abkhazia and South Ossetia have influenced the way it has responded to Russia (or has arguably been "forced" to respond).

What the conflict in Georgia has also brought to the forefront of this analysis (and what the Cyprus conflict first introduced) is the challenge that strong nationalism presents to the construction of an alternative narrative in protracted conflict. Georgian President Mikheil

Sakaashvili rose to power out of a strong nationalist movement that inspired the Rose Revolution in 2003. The revolution ousted former President (and Communist Party member) Eduard Shevardnadze from office. Since his election (and re-election in 2007), Sakaashvili has made the "restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity his top priority" (International Crisis Group, 2007). In his speeches to the people of Georgia, he has continuously invoked the victimization of Georgians with images of Russia's negative influence over the region. Most recently, he has referred to Russia as "the elephant in the room that is disrupting the peace process" and that "Russian imperialist boots are again stomping our country" while adding that Georgia "will resist all kind of aggression and will never be put on its knees again" (2008, July 10; 2008, August 11). *EurasiaNet*. Highlighting these examples is not meant to suggest that Georgia is the primary cause of the conflict or should be blamed for the current crisis in Georgia so much as to point out the constant reinforcement that political leaders contribute to the conflict narrative that has been constructed. In situations where political leaders are not committed to the deconstruction of the conflict, they can serve as impediments to any attempt to write a new story through their continued attachment and promotion of the conflict narrative.

Another obstacle to building trust and confidence between parties in Georgia has been the media. According to International Crisis Group (2008):

> The UN Secretary-General concluded that inaccurate reports originating in the Georgian media and, occasionally, by the Georgian authorities have contributed to growing distrust and insecurity, ultimately increasing the chances of confrontation … fanning fears and hostility through misrepresentation that make harder the restoration of confidence that is a stated objective of the sides (International Crisis Group, 2008, p. 22).

While the intent of this paper has not been to document each and every external obstacle to a successful mediation, the significance of the media in a narrative context is that it has the potential to reinforce the conflict narrative through seemingly "objective" facts. This supplements the rhetoric of conflict espoused by leaders, thereby creating a strong case for the

continuation of negative perceptions and stereotypes of the other party. Any re-authoring of the conflict narrative would require the same support from the media with an agreement to refrain from reporting unsubstantiated incidents of hostility.

All ten of International Crisis Group's policy reports and briefings on Georgia have recommended "incremental confidence-building measures" with the de facto authorities in each breakway region to "develop essential mutual trust and confidence" (International Crisis Group, 2007). While these certainly have the potential of making strides toward peace, the question that remains is whether such measures are possible without first addressing the perceptions of each party that have contributed to the conflict? If negotiations over confidence building measures have failed in the past wouldn't trust need to be built before either side is willing to make and commit to perceived concessions/sacrifices? International Crisis Report notes that, "attempts to bring Abkhaz and Georgia together have been blocked by obstacles to freedom of movement, communication, and trade" (International Crisis Group, 2008). While these are clear structural impediments, one might argue that they are also internally derived – requiring a conversation that will incorporate a thorough examination of the misunderstandings, assumptions, and perceptions that have influenced each party's actions. These internal considerations aren't acknowledged in a negotiation format that is focused mostly on what each party is willing to give the other without compromising its security or power. Parties become pre-occupied by the effects of the conflict, rather than forming a deeper understanding of what has caused their relationship to deteriorate. Failure to evaluate those causes can lead to continued deadlock and the flare-up of violence.

Regrettably, Russia's recent decision to engage with Georgia's military has only served to reinforce the negative images that Georgia's nationalist leaders have been touting all along. This

has intensified the difficulty of countering Georgian perceptions that Russia has been the cause

of the conflict. To make matters worse, an overwhelming focus on Russia's influence has led to

the inability of Georgia to foster an improved relationship with de facto Abkhazian and South

Ossetian authorities. From a narrative perspective, exploring opportunities for unique outcomes

in Georgia's relationship with the separatist regions is the key to transforming the conflict.

Without an acknowledgement on Georgia's part that the separatist regions are primary characters

in the story, the country will continue to miss opportunities for constructive engagement.

Barriers to The Application of Narrative Mediation

The previous examples of Northern Ireland, Cyprus, and Georgia illustrate the emotional and relational complexities that have contributed to the intractability of the conflicts in each of these countries. The way negotiations have typically been handled have favored putting the political and economic interests of the parties at the forefront of discussions. In Georgia, for instance, negotiations have typically revolved around territorial status, international displaced persons (IDPs) and refugee returns, and confederal and common-state options (International Crisis Group, 2007). These are clearly important considerations, but the continued failure to reach agreement on these issues suggests that attempts to redress the relationship of the parties must be made before resolution on the structural issues can be reached. This section takes a deeper look at the division that exists between official (Track One) and unofficial (Track Three) attempts at conflict resolution in protracted conflict and highlights the barriers to implementing narrative mediation at the Track One level.

Lederach (2005) ascribes the overwhelming preference to address the economic and political issues of protracted conflicts to the way peace building has been dominated by our exclusive reliance on representational leadership. According to Lederach (2005):

> *Realpolitik* has dominated not only how politics has been traditionally defined in the era of nation-states but how building peace itself is conceptualized. *Realpolitik* proposes a peacebuilding methodology. Rooted in the history of nation-state building and power politics, the methodology contributes several useful and necessary tools, particularly the capacity to assess which set of people can deliver pain or destroy processes. In other words, *realpolitik* assesses change and the validity of change according to the power defined by military and economic influences. The same methodology, however, makes a leap of faith not supported by the evidence found in recent peace processes that those who appear under the lens of *realpolitik* criteria are therefore the ones who should define the

parameters of peace negotiations and who will safeguard its proper implementation (Lederach, 2005, p. 59).

Lederach (2005) continues:

> *Realpolitik* is blind to the existence of social spaces, relationships, ideas, and processes that do not fit its preexisting definition of what counts. Therefore, for the most part, worse than miscalculating, it completely misses some of the most significant elements of social process capable of generating relational patterns of structures. *Realpolitik* also has the abysmal record of destroying rather than building the very thing most needed for sustaining the platforms capable of delivering a dynamic justpeace: public confidence and authentic public engagement (Lederach, 2005, p. 60).

If the preference for addressing these issues over others emanates from interests that lie outside the public sphere, or (as has been previously suggested) by nationalist leaders who reinforce an attachment to conflict narratives that promote distrust and shape the perceived "needs" of their constituents, then one of the primary obstacles to negotiating the resolution of protracted conflicts lies not just in what is discussed but in the level at which peace is negotiated.

In the case of Northern Ireland and Cyprus, public participation was limited to a final vote on peace initiatives that were negotiated without the involvement of both communities. This lack of participation is what ultimately led to what Lederach (2005) describes as "a profound deficit of public authenticity, which shows up most often in the post-agreement phase" (Lederach, 2005, p. 60). Had there been a more direct attempt to incorporate the public in the peace process, and had the relational and emotional factors that contributed to the conflict been broached, there might very well have been a greater sense of ownership of the settlement and a better sense of what has hindered the abilities of the parties to peacefully coexist.

Interestingly, research in Cyprus and Northern Ireland reveals that attempts to transform the conflicts in both regions have also been supported by Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs). Fisher (2001) notes:

> In 1994, the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy (IMTD) and the NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science were joined by the Conflict Management Group (CMG) to form the Cyprus Consortium, which over a five-year period organized a variety of training workshops for educators, graduate students, trainers, policy leaders, and other 'citizen peacebuilders' in the two communities of

Cyprus. The goal of the consortium was not to infringe on the work of official diplomacy, but rather to create a complementary social peacebuilding process that must be part of the eventual resolution of the conflict (Fisher, 2001, p. 320).

Fisher (2001) adds that the goal of the consortium was to provide support (and direction) to civil society, rather than to focus on the national political issues that were at the forefront of official negotiations. Unfortunately, most of the unofficial attempts at transforming the conflict in Cyprus have been characterized by "a lack of continuity and/or connection to both the decisionmaking level and official mediation efforts" (Fisher, 2001, p. 317). Despite this, however, Fisher (2001) notes that "several unofficial interventions that have spanned the course of the conflict appear to have served a useful pre- or para- negotiation function" by opening dialogue between the parties and encouraging their receptivity to engaging (or reengaging) in negotiations (Fisher, 2001, p. 323). Interestingly, one overwhelming similarity between the Cyprus Consortium and other unofficial approaches has been the concentration on "surfacing antagonisms and allowing for deeper, reflective analysis of underlying fears" (Fisher, 2001).

Fisher (2001) argues that such issues have largely been missing at the UN level mediation process, stating:

> Although UN mediators have exercised skill, persistence, and respect, the arguments and formulations they offer do not adequately address the deep fears and basic needs of the parties. When a proposal was acceptable to one party but not the other, it was rewritten to address the concerns of the opposing party. When the modifications were resubmitted, however, the first party removed its acceptance (even though the substance changed little). Positional bargaining based in a realist, power-coercive philosophy of inter-party relations has dominated the interaction. This highly competitive, suspicious, and adversarial approach to negotiation focused on self-interests and hardened positions, demonstrates the inappropriateness of traditional negotiation and mediation in emerging and escalating identity-based conflicts (Fisher, 2001, p. 322).

Bahavar (2001) notes in an interview with Dr. Joseph Montville from the Preventative Diplomacy Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) that:

> Intractable conflicts escalate to dominate, absorb, and direct much of the energies and resources of all communities directly involved, ultimately involving every aspect of inter-communal relations. In such circumstances, the primary goal of conflict resolution should be seen as changing the conditions of intractability at many levels of society - no official agreement will truly resolve ethnic conflict (Bahavar, 2001, Insufficiency of Track One section).

Bahavar (2001) argues that NGOs are best positioned to fill in the gap left by Track One

mediation through their devotion to "capacity building through consultation, dialogue, and

training in conflict resolution for people on all sides of an ethnic conflict", adding "NGO

facilitation efforts aim at broad-based social change, one person at a time" (Bahavar, 2001,

Filling the Peacemaking Gap section). In other words, the focus on the communities (who

ultimately decide whether the rhetoric of peace is translated into action) is what makes NGOs so

well suited for picking up the proverbial slack in official mediation attempts.

    Given the focus that NGOs have on civil society and inter-group dynamics, the application of

narrative mediation could be highly compatible and complimentary to their programming. The

use of dialogue as a way of exploring the fears and assumptions that are so often ignored by

Track One mediations has already been used in unofficial attempts to resolve protracted conflicts

(including Cyprus). As has been previously mentioned, however, dialogues are supplemental to

mediation and when used alone they can often be perceived as lacking a definitive purpose or

goal. Moreover, while dialogue deconstructs the beliefs and assumptions that shape parties

interactions, there is no explicit recognition of the power that exists to transform conflicted

relationships through narrative reconstruction. This is an important and complimentary step if

the work done to deconstruct the conflict is going to be maintained by the parties.

    Incorporating narrative mediation into an NGO's toolbox, however, does not avoid the

difficulty that exists in bridging the gap between unofficial conflict resolution activity and high

level diplomacy. Cochrane (2000) points out that those interviewed in the International Study of

Peace/Conflict Resolution Organizations (ISPO), a major internationally comparative effort to

analyze the nature, role and impact of NGOs, felt "NGOs in Northern Ireland exerted a

substantial indirect influence on public opinion, through small-scale initiatives with practical

outcomes, rather than mass mobilizations and protests" (Cochrane, 2000, p. 18). While much work was done at the community level, however, it was isolated in nature and didn't directly influence the political process (Cochrane, 2000). This poses a significant challenge to narrative mediation since track one negotiators are less inclined to adopt a narrative approach on their own and anything done at the grassroots level is difficult to apply to a wider audience.

If it's clear that Track One negotiations have consistently failed to identify the emotional/relational complexities of protracted conflict, relying solely on grassroots organizations to address these issues is not a sufficient alternative to the incorporation of emotional/relational considerations in official negotiations. If it's possible for the resolution of the relational/emotional impediments to increase the likelihood of cooperation in the political and economic spheres that have tended to dominate diplomatic efforts, what barriers to the adoption of narrative mediation exist at the Track One level? One of these has already been mentioned (e.g., the propensity of politicians and the media to support and reinforce an attachment to conflict narratives), but there are additional obstacles worth noting.

One of the most obvious difficulties with the adoption of narrative mediation at the official level is the assumed commitment to a peaceful end of the conflict by political and governmental representatives. According to Touval and Zartman (1985), "It would be rare for governments to engage in mediation for humanitarian reasons only. They probably expect the mediator's intervention to work in their favor" (Touval & Zartman,1985, p. 8). Touval & Zartman (1985) continue:

> Invitation or acceptance of mediation may be related to additional power-political considerations. One or both parties may wish to gain time, or to be relieved of the dilemma of choosing between escalation and concessions. Or, one side may wish to engage the third party and enlist its support in the expectation that the negotiations will fail to produce an agreement. Another possibility is that mediation will provide the occasion for improving relations with the mediator, while souring relations between the mediator and the adversary. Such power-related side effects may be an important motive for inviting or accepting mediation (Touval & Zartman, 1985, p. 10).

Because narrative mediation focuses mostly on the relationship between the parties and the root causes of the conflict, parties that seek mediation as a forum for building or sustaining political power would be hesitant to commit to a process that focused predominately on improving the parties' relationship. Continued conflict or a perceived "upper-hand" would allow one party to retain power over the other. A real commitment to peace or to an equal partnership might therefore be seen as undesirable and much more difficult to avoid in a mediation in which the focus is on deconstructing the stereotypes and negative perceptions that have allowed political and governmental representatives to come to power.

Another road-block to the adoption of narrative mediation at the track one level is the investment of time that narrative mediation requires. Since the focus of the narrative approach is on the dynamics of the relationship between parties, transforming the conflict will require not just a realization on the part of the participants of the influence that social discourses have had on their exchanges, but it will also require time for an alternative narrative to be created. In official negotiations in which the focus is on bargaining over things like territory or demilitarization, the need for continued mediation is not necessary (or not deemed necessary) once agreement on the issues has been reached. The narrative approach views multiple mediation sessions as important to the monitoring and fostering of the new narrative of the parties. This is troublesome in protracted conflict given the years of failed attempts at establishing peace at the Track One level. Engaging in a process that requires more time and no guarantee that things will change rapidly could be seen to create a situation in which parties who aren't truly committed to achieving peace could thwart the peace process. It could also be viewed as a sign to constituents that political representatives aren't making any real progress in transforming the conflict.

While the time demand is a clear obstacle, it should also be noted that a peace process with a more gradual and long-term focus may also be viewed positively in the eyes of the communities involved. As Lederach (2005) points out, "The rise of conflict happens over long periods of time, but the images of the peace accord and the post-accord are often seen in much shorter periods" (Lederach, 2005, p. 44). There is something quite bizarre about peace accords when they are viewed on the timeline of the conflicts they intend to transform. As Lederach (2005) points out, in areas like Liberia, Northern Ireland, Columbia, and Sudan conflicts have spanned from 12 to 50 years. Given the chronology of violence, it's not difficult to imagine why the level of pessimism among those who have been living in protracted conflict is so high when faced with peace accords that are focused on reversing the conflict quickly (sometimes in just a matter of a few years). Less time devoted to negotiations may reduce opportunities for spoiling, but more time may create a more authentic process for those at the community level.

The emphasis on relationships within the narrative approach also creates an organic or "touchy-feely" first impression to those who are accustomed to a more problem-solving orientation. This not only impedes the ability of narrative mediation to be taken as seriously as negotiations over the more tangible interests of each party, but it also requires narrative mediators to convince governments and political representatives to embark on a discussion that investigates the negative stereotypes, assumptions, and fallacious arguments that have been propelling each side of the conflict. This can create an environment in which negotiators feel vulnerable to a journey that has no predetermined destination. In a negotiation over territory, it's a bit easier to foresee the possible outcomes and worst case scenarios whereas a conversation about the relationship of the parties requires them to relinquish some of their control and to trust the other party enough that such issues can be discussed without fear of any admittances being

used against them. Moreover, any improvement in the relationship of the parties may inspire

creative solutions to the conflict that change the power dynamics involved. This could have

various economic or political implications that neither party has foreseen or had time to

comprehend. There is one way, however, that this fear may be mitigated and that's by the timing

of narrative mediation's introduction.

As has been previously mentioned, protracted conflicts are often characterized by stalled

negotiations. International Crisis Group has stated that in such instances, unilateral trust building

measures have needed to be implemented (by either party) through political, military, or

economic concessions. If building trust is needed and negotiations are stalled anyway, the

introduction of narrative mediation may be a better way of encouraging trust since concession-

making isn't the primary focus of the narrative approach. The risk involved in exploring the

relationship between the parties is much lower in comparison to an alternative that would require

either party to give something up as a way of encouraging further participation. The trick,

however, is doing so before negotiations get so stalled that neither party is willing to reengage

with the other unless a particular concession is made.

Overcoming the embedded attachments to conflict narratives is another obstacle to the

adoption of the narrative approach. This is particularly true of narratives informed by a group or

individual's religion. One of the things Winslade and Monk emphasize is that postmodernism is

grounded in the assumption that world meanings are fluid and susceptible to change, but people

may reject the assertion that the things they assign meaning to are capable of being changed.

Winslade and Monk (2001) note, "Many people view things in black and white terms and prefer

to adhere to fundamentalist perspectives of various kinds" (Winslade & Monk, 2005, p. 221).

Adding, "From these perspectives, meanings are fixed and nonnegotiable" (Winslade & Monk,

2005, p. 221). If a mediator was to question these meanings it could be interpreted by the parties

as a sign of disrespect and obstruct any further participation. While this is clearly a sensitive

area, however, there are ways of addressing fundamentalism without putting the parties in a

defensive position.

According to Winslade and Monk (2001):

We advocate for an approach that avoids directly confronting a person's fundamentalist beliefs and also openly and actively works to create space for new meanings to emerge. One way of doing this by inviting a discussion about how a person engages with an authority figure and reposition the person as an active participant in relation to that authority (God, for example) rather than as a simple parrot of this authority or as a passive recipient of the authority's help. This can be done within the story as it is framed in the person's own worldview.

Although examples of how to engage with fundamentalist perspectives are largely drawn from

Winslade and Monk's work in domestic divorce mediations, the potential of using their approach

in a wider context is still palpable. Winslade and Monk illustrate how to reposition

fundamentalist views in a series of questions, using the example of a divorcing couple where the

ex-husband holds strong Christian beliefs and sees the actions of his ex-wife as sins against God

that are worthy of punishment. Winslade and Monk (2001) state:

In individual sessions, Angus could be asked if he would be willing to explore the role of God in the mediation to help address the issues of custody and access. If Angus agrees, the mediator might ask him the following questions:
- Knowing that God means different things to different people, what is the meaning of God in your life?
- What led you to have these ideas of God (and not others)?
- How does God view you and your life as it has been?
- What is God's view of this dispute and what is God's assessment of the part you are playing in resolving this conflict?
- Would God favor your role in helping settle this dispute and be outraged by your ex-partner's and children's views?
- How is God communicating to you this degree of certainty? Has there been any circumstance in which you have experienced, even for a slight moment, a spark of uncertainty about what God wants of you in any particular circumstance? (Winslade & Monk, 2001, pp. 222-223).

Introducing these questions is not intended to give the impression that the barriers that fundamentalist attachments to worldviews present will instantly be overcome, but it does illustrate that rigid perceptions remain fodder for exploration and should not be avoided by mediators simply because of their sensitivity. As Winslade and Monk (2001) point out:

> These questions are designed to name overtly the private certainties that a person with a fundamentalist viewpoint might hold. We are seeking to open even the smallest spaces for a person to consider alternative descriptions of the conflict as it has unfolded. We are working to assist people with strong convictions (like "Angus") to recognize that other views might have some validity in the conflict (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 223).

Finally, another impediment to the application of narrative mediation at the track one level is that high level officials are not always adequate representatives of the communities in conflict. This is one of the major criticisms of peace agreements – the community voice is often missing from the process. The adoption of narrative mediation at the Track One level may allow some of the relational issues to be addressed, but it relies entirely on a group of people who often have a different conception of the conflict. The day-to-day realities of living in protracted conflict are not the same for their constituents. Consequently, any adoption of narrative mediation without community involvement would lack an authentic narrative account of the conflict and create an alternative narrative that is missing input from key actors in the plotline. For this reason, applying narrative mediation at the Track One level might be inefficient without some linkage to the track two or track three levels.

The potential for linked negotiations can be seen in the 1993 Inter-Tajik Dialogues that contributed to UN sponsored negotiations to end the Tajik civil war of 1992-1997. According to Zartman (2008):

> The formal negotiating strategy of the UN excluded civil associations and public opinion just as much as ethnic and regional interests. The UN tried to shield both sides from domestic pressure and interference to inhibit hard-line factions on all sides (or "spoilers") from exerting pressure on the negotiating teams to resist compromise. Because the UN mediators tried to shelter negotiating parties

from public opinion or local civil society, only changes in the political and geopolitical pressures on both parties seemed to motivate their settlement (Zartman, 2008, p. 59).

Zartman (2008) adds that even before UN negotiations began there were other attempts at peacebuilding in Tajikistan already underway. According to Zartman (2008):

> The Inter-Tajik Dialogue, led by a team of Russians and Americans working together in the Dartmouth Conference Sustained Dialogue program, met several times a year for extended periods of several days. Their meetings became a type of informal or "second-track" diplomacy, which developed a number of contributions to the formal negotiations. The Inter-Tajik Dialogue published memoranda periodically and informed the UN and diplomatic officials of neighboring countries about the discussions and the ideas they generated (Zartman, 2008, pp. 59-60).

Zartman (2008) continues:

> Participants carried ideas from the Dialogue directly to official negotiations. Slim and Saunders report: "Among the delegates to the first round of official negotiations in Moscow, one member of the government team and two members of the UTO (?) team were also participants in the Inter-Tajik Dialogue" (Slim and Saunders 2001). Between 1993 and 1996, when political negotiations seemed deadlocked or often on the verge of collapse, participants in this informal or "track two" diplomacy continued to provide ideas for both sides in the political negotiations, including ideas for overcoming attitudes and misconceptions that blocked progress along the way. These ideas helped both parties in the formal negotiations to redefine their interests, and to develop new norms and patterns of behavior (Zartman, 2008, p. 60).

The Inter-Tajik Dialogues are one example of how the linkage between different tracks can contribute to the progression of peace negotiations. Narrative mediation will fail to capture the voice of the community when it is only applied at the track one level. Any positive outcomes from its adoption by NGOs and civil society groups, however, will be less than optimally used if disconnected from track one negotiations. Therefore, creating strategic linkages among the various tracks seems necessary to ensure narrative mediation's widespread implementation and effectiveness.

Assessment

What is clear from the preceding sections is that the unique nature of protracted conflicts and the need for a continued relationship between the parties in conflict requires a mediation approach that more explicitly incorporates both substantive and relational considerations. What has largely been missing from formal peace accords and official negotiations are direct attempts at unearthing the negative relational dynamics that have contributed to the intractable psychology of communities and a way out of the conflict that incorporates, rather than glosses over, the complex historical narratives of the parties involved. Northern Ireland is one example of a seemingly successful attempt at forming a peaceful end to decades of violence, but what has remained evident after a decade of "peace" is that the psychological division of catholic and protestant communities remains and the potential for renewed violence. It seems that opportunities for addressing competing historical accounts and negative stereotypes that fuel animosity have largely been regarded as issues best left for reconciliation efforts rather than as potential areas where resolution could foster a more inclusive or "authentic" peace settlement.

In Cyprus, the chronic inability of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots to reach agreement can be attributed (in-part) to a deep distrust between the two communities and the promotion of negative stereotypes by intransigent leaders, a nationalist culture, and biased curriculum in schools. Official negotiations have been consumed by the pursuit of tangible interests and mutual compromise without direct attempts to undermine the relational forces that have helped shape the proposed "needs" of both sides. This has also been the case in Georgia, where the failure to explore the dysfunctional relationship between Georgia, the separatist states of

Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Russia have left negotiating parties without any real trust or incentive to move forward. Moreover, the failure to agree on the root causes of the conflict or to discuss how certain actions have been internalized by each party have done nothing to prevent either side from making nonnegotiable demands. Attributing such demands merely to a strong BATNA (or "Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement") oversimplifies the powerful relational dynamics that are informing certain decisions and behaviors. This is more clearly identifiable in cases where there is a refusal to forge an agreement or make a concession even when it is in the interest of both parties.

Given the holes that exist in transforming protracted conflicts at the track one level, narrative mediation is well positioned to offer a way to address the relational and emotional influences that have plagued the ability of groups to reach an authentic resolution of conflict. The deconstruction of negative discourses creates an opportunity for blame to be assigned to something other than the parties themselves while the active search for unique outcomes provides evidence for a new narrative of the relationship to be written. Stories are an intimate part of conflicts with deep roots in history and if each participant has developed a strong attachment to their narrative of the conflict, using narrative mediation to dissect those stories and to help parties unlock unrealized examples of cooperation has the potential to enhance the richness of achievable resolution. Additionally, narrative mediation contributes to the shared future of conflicted parties by creating a mutually agreed upon narrative that could shape the way future generations look back at the history of their interactions with their neighbors.

While the narrative approach is more easily adopted at the grassroots level and by organizations whose goals are to peacefully engage and integrate communities living in conflict, focusing exclusively on the track three level will not have the necessary impact on official

deliberations that is so desperately needed. Several barriers to the implementation of narrative

mediation at the track one level remain. Overcoming the propensity of government leaders and

political representatives to value power-plays and opportunities to exploit vulnerabilities over a

strict adherence to peace, the difficulties of committing to a long-term process that is slow to

change, and the seemingly "touch-feely" aspect of an approach to mediation that carries no

foreseeable outcome are only a few of the obstacles to implementation at the official level. For

this reason, creating a link between the track three and track one level is the best way of ensuring

that the narrative approach has a deeper application in conflicted communities. This will require

a level of commitment that is difficult to garner in an environment where the patience of parties

has been virtually exhausted time after time, but such a commitment also carries with it a

potential for peace that is far richer and more lasting than anything that has been realized in

regions that have found themselves in unbreakable cycles of conflict.

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